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CHRISTIAN COURIER

The aftermath: Christians still providing relief in five disaster-stricken countries

Peter Frieswick

HUNTSVILLE, Ont. – In this globalized age of 24-hour news stations and instant online updates, it's hard to know how to fulfill Jesus' command to love one's neighbour. There have been so many natural disasters within the last 18 months that it seems impossible to keep track of them all. Some, such as Haiti's earthquake, received media attention for months. Others, like the New Zealand quake, were a mere blip on our social radar before the next crisis dominated world news.

Whether or not the international community remembers its disaster-struck neighbours, aid efforts are still underway, often bogged down due to a lack of relief workers, a shortage of supplies and the disrupted infrastructures of affected countries. *Christian Courier* has contacted five faith-based organizations to follow-up on the world's most recent disasters, and to find out how concerned Christians can help bring relief to those who need it most.

Haiti

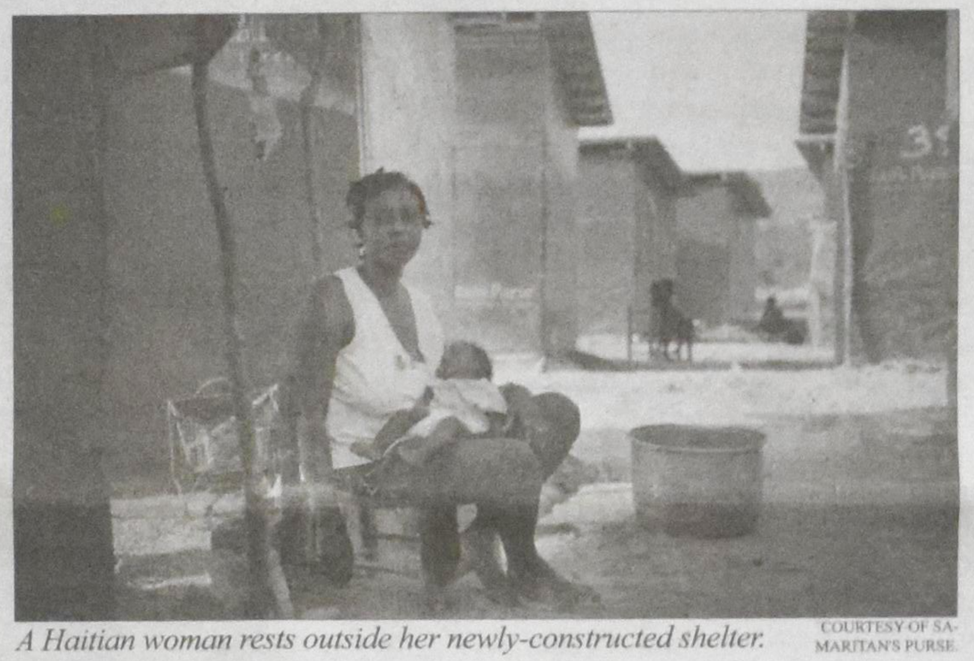
"If you drive through Port-au-Prince or Lygon, you'll see hundreds of thousands of people still living in tents in squalid conditions. You'll see streets blocked with rubble . . . very little has been done . . . it remains a catastrophic disaster."

Ken Isaacs, VP of Programs and Government Relations with Samaritan's Purse, highlights Haiti's current needs after the January 2010 earthquake killed upwards of 316,000 people and created enough rubble to fill six Superdomes. The debris still hampers relief work, as only 10 percent has been removed over a year later. Among the many problems currently afflicting Haiti is the outbreak of the waterborne disease cholera, a potentially fatal bacterial infection that has killed 3,000 and left more than 150,000 sick after drinking the only water available to them – usually found in polluted streams or sewers, according to the Manitoba Nurses Union. Samaritan's Purse is combating the disease by installing clean water facilities in critically needed places.

Simon Barrington, the Executive Director of Samaritan's Purse in the U.K., describes a remote village he visited recently while checking on the country's reconstruction. The community was holding a celebration after Samaritan's Purse helped them complete a spring-capped well, a project that took six months to build and will provide 4,000 people with clean, safe drinking water – a first for many of them.

"And along with it," writes Barrington, "there [will] be an end to the dysentery, diarrhea and disease that has blighted their community for generations."

More info:
samaritanspurse.ca
salvationarmy.org
crwrc.org
worldvision.org.nz
churcheshelpingchurches.com



A Haitian woman rests outside her newly-constructed shelter. COURTESY OF SAMARITAN'S PURSE

Chile

The 7.0 magnitude earthquake that killed 500 people in Chile on February 27, 2010, also left 200,000 homeless. While the Chilean government reports that 90 percent of "hospitals, ports, roads and schools damaged in the quake have been rebuilt or made functional," a large number of "quake refugees" still live in tent cities.

The Salvation Army, which has been working in Chile since 1909, has been reaching out to this group of people, some of whom lived in

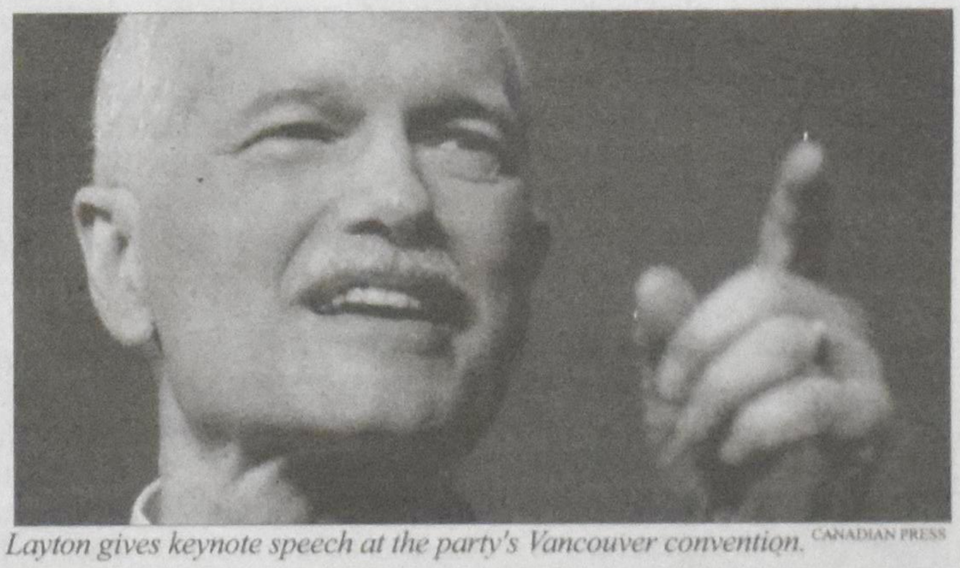
See **Relief** *on page 2*

NDP makes its mark in Ottawa

Harold Alkema with
Angela Reitsma Bick

OTTAWA, Ont. – After 58 hours of debate, the bill enforcing the Canadian Union of Postal Workers back to work was finally passed June 27, despite the New Democratic Party's (NDP) best efforts to stall it. "We intend to fight the legislation every step of the way," NDP leader Jack Layton said just before the filibuster began, "using all procedural manoeuvres that are possible in the House of Commons." Backing the union fits the party's historical platform but didn't go over well with Canadians – most of whom just wanted mail service resumed. Small business owners and charities experienced the most loss during the two-week strike. Nonetheless, the filibuster was a bold early move for Canada's newest Official Opposition.

The May election, of course, gave the NDP the strength in parliament to mount actions like the recent filibuster. The event radically altered the fortunes of nearly all Canadian federal political parties. It marked the advent of a Conservative majority; the Liberal Party being reduced to a rump; the decimation of the Bloc Quebecois (BQ), and Elizabeth May claiming the Green party's first seat in parliament.



Layton gives keynote speech at the party's Vancouver convention. CANADIAN PRESS

One of the biggest surprises, however, was the election surge of the NDP, which – for the first time in their history – now form the official opposition with 103 seats. Shifts among the other parties bode well for the NDP. The near demise of the BQ allowed the party to make unprecedented gains in Quebec. The subpar showing by the Liberals created the necessary space for the NDP to become the second biggest party in the House of Commons. Finally, the introduction of a Green party Member of Parliament (MP) to the house will undoubtedly raise the profile of environmental issues

See **NDP** *on page 2*

News

Relief *continued*

improvised tents outside of their destroyed homes in an attempt to feel connected to their old way of life.

"The Salvation Army [distributes] approximately 300 prepared meals and water daily. Teams are working in and with the community, and have organised community members to help in the preparation and distribution of food," the organization reports on its website.

Salvation Army gives out 300 meals a day.

In addition to this, Salvation Army workers pray with those who have been deeply, traumatically affected by this disaster.

CRWRC

Sri Lankans welcome bread delivery.

Sri Lanka

In January and February of this year, monsoon rains caused severe flooding and mudslides, displacing over one million people in Sri Lanka, an island nation in South Asia. High water levels drowned livestock, polluted wells, destroyed crops and cut off some communities from access to food, water or aid.

The most pressing concern for flooded refugees is food, as over 200,000 hectares of rice, a Sri Lankan staple, was destroyed, leaving fewer than 500,000 ha for a population estimated to be over 20 billion. Rice experts warn that even more will be lost if fungal diseases, which impact rice growth, spread outside of flooded areas.

The Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC), a ministry of the Christian Reformed Church, was one of the first organizations to respond to the crisis. They credit their fast response time to the strong relationships they formed and maintained with organizations like LEADS (a Sri Lankan partner organization), when they spent four years providing relief to the country after a tsunami hit the country in 2004.

At present, the CRWRC is working with LEADS to provide 400 different families with $40,000 worth of emergency items, kitchen utensils, hygiene kits, dry rations and tarps. Both organizations are also providing $185,000 of immediate food aid for 1,500 for three months in North Eastern Sri Lanka.

CRWRC's work focuses on providing the best care to those who need it most. "There are very isolated places where we are working, so it is a matter of justice, since many of the people are overlooked by the [Sri Lankan] government," said Grace Wiebe, a Senior Project Manager with the organization's International Disaster Response Team. "We also focus on female-headed households because they are more vulnerable and more in poverty."

New Zealand

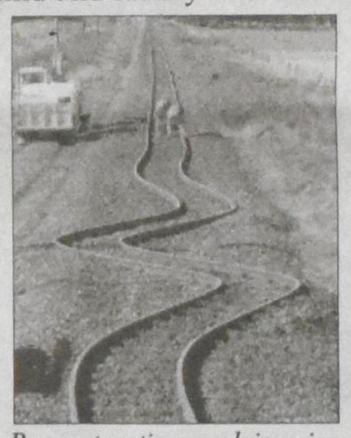
February 22's quake lasted roughly a minute, but the destruction it caused is far from over. Months later, New Zealand weatherman Philip Duncan walked around the "red zone," the area of Christchurch where over 184 buildings have been identified as unsafe.

"I point out a one storey building which has a collapsed roof. My Christchurch friends tell me it was once two stories. I note what looks like a large empty car park – my Christchurch friends tell me that used to be an entire block of two and three storey buildings. It is simply surreal . . ." he posted online.

The damage is not just structural but mental. Some Christchurch residents will not work in buildings that swayed during the event. It also appears that some are turning to gambling to cope, as the country's Internal Affairs agency noted a significant increase in gambling after the disaster, despite a quarter of the city's gaming venues being knocked out by the earthquake.

World Vision was one of the relief agencies that responded shortly after the disaster, collaborating with a number of partners to support key areas of disaster relief management and psychosocial child and family welfare.

"World Vision New Zealand worked with local offices of the Salvation Army to help meet needs in Christchurch's severely damaged suburbs, including providing food, shelter and logistical support to help children and their families who were affected by this terrible disaster," said Caroline Riseboro, World Vision Canada's VP of Public Affairs.



Reconstruction work is going slowly in Christchurch.

Japan

March's earthquake and subsequent tsunami resulted in terrible losses for the Japanese people. Over the last three months, search teams have found and identified an average of 50 bodies a day, slowly bringing down the missing persons count while adding to the total number of deaths. On June 26, the National Police Agency reported 15,500 dead and 7,306 still missing across the country. Since suicide among survivors is a serious concern, psychiatric teams have been providing help and relief to over 14,000 people in recent weeks.

Church in Tohoku, Japan, offers counseling for quake victims.

A Christ-centred organization, Churches Helping Churches (CHC), is applying their own unique solution: they're giving aid to churches first. CHC Executive Director Tom Kim explains that his organization focuses on providing "spiritual support and development aid to the pastors and their churches who are often the *de facto* leaders in . . . affected communities," as a compliment to the humanitarian aid that pours into disaster struck countries.

At present, CHC is creating a retreat that will offer Gospel-centred, Biblical crisis counselling to pastors, who are surrounded by people experiencing great grief and spiritual crisis. As Kim explains, "When the basic things in life can't be trusted – such as the ground beneath your feet, the air that touches your skin or the seaside view that you've always enjoyed – it does something to the mind and emotions. We need 10 times more physical relief and 20 times more spiritual relief."

Your turn

In the face of the overwhelming needs of these five disasters (and let us not forget the Middle East revolutions, nor the other calamities that didn't make it into this article), it's easy to feel powerless to help and love our global neighbours.

Yet even if we cannot volunteer or donate, we can do something. In a simple statement that could fit any of our world-troubles, a Japanese friend of John Stark, an editor with The Gospel Coalition, said it best after he asked her how he could help the people of Japan: "Please pray and encourage us to fight a good fight, finish the race and keep the faith until the Lord takes us home with him."

Peter Frieswick (peter.frieswick@gmail.com) holds a BA in English Honours and Theatre from Redeemer. Currently interning at a Christ-centred conference and retreat centre, he looks forward to entering a Master's level creative writing program.

NDP *continued*

– a policy area in which the NDP is also strong.

Labels, strategy debate

Yet for all the gains the party has made and its many possibilities for the future, a few observers have noted that Canada's lone socialist party seems to be dealing with an identity crisis. At the party's national convention held in Vancouver June 17-19, some delegates proposed a merger with the much reduced Liberal party. Others proposed radical changes to the preamble to the party's constitution.

In a speech to the 1,500 delegates, MP Pat Martin suggested removing the word "socialism" from the party's official charter. He claimed the label was outdated, adding that it scared people and held the party back. Some members of the audience booed Martin. Ultimately the convention decided to leave the constitution unchanged for the moment, but referred the preamble to the party's executive for possible rewriting. Thus the party leadership delayed a potentially divisive vote.

More controversy was created when delegate Trevor Zimmerman proposed a motion that would rule out a future merger with the Liberal party. One delegate spoke in favour of Zimmerman's idea, stating: "We need to stand on our own two feet." Nova Scotia MP Peter Stoffer disagreed, claiming that it would be a tactical mistake to close the door on any discussion with the Liberals in the future. In the end, the delegates decided to remain open to some form of union.

In one area the NDP showed a remarkable level of agreement. In a leadership vote, the delegates gave Jack Layton 97.9 percent support. At the convention, Layton emphatically denied the notion that his party was facing an identity crisis. Summarizing the convention debate in the most positive terms, he said, "There was no disagreement about the values. It was about the nature of the label." Layton, however, refuses to call himself a socialist. As if to further advance his argument that terminology did not matter, he added that social democrat and democratic socialist were nearly synonymous terms that, perhaps, better described the party's orientation.

Much of Layton's success as leader has been based on downplaying rhetoric and emphasizing his own leadership, campaigning skills and ability to offer a strong critique of government policy. This approach has brought the NDP out of the Canadian political wilderness and given it a great deal of official recognition and popularity. In some ways the debates in Vancouver could best be described as understandable growing pains. The party seems to be humouring proposals intended to consolidate and build upon its recent successes. If the postal strike debate is any indication, any advances by the party will have a major impact on the everyday lives of Canadians.

Harold Alkema is a student of public policy at Carleton University. He lives in Ottawa with his wife Heather.

Column/News

Christ @ Culture

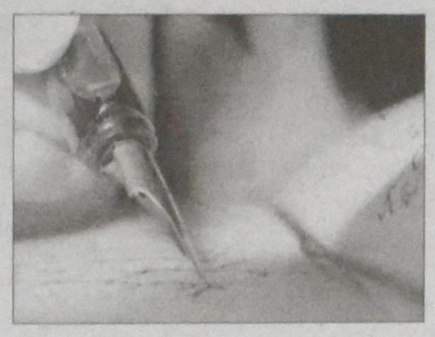
Lloyd Rang

An open letter to my 16-year-old self

I've seen a few people on Facebook writing letters to their 16-year old selves. What a great idea! Who hasn't wanted to travel back in time and give themselves a shake? And what better way to talk about how much and how fast the world is changing – as this column tries to do, each month – than to take a trip back in time?

So I thought I'd share my letter with you.

* * * * *



Dear Lloyd:

You'd better sit down.

This is you – a 43-year-old you – speaking to you from the future. I know what you're thinking. You want to know what the future is like. You want to know if we landed on Mars. You want to know if we have flying cars. You want to know if you got the Rang family grey-hair gene.

Well, I'm sorry, Lloyd, I'm not here to tell you about that stuff. I'm here to give you some advice you really need. So listen closely.

The first thing I want to tell you is that you're going to stop getting taller, eventually. I know it doesn't seem that way because every morning your arm feels like it's four inches longer than when you went to bed.

That explains the three or four bowls of oatmeal you've spilled in Dad's lap at breakfast.

Listen – it's okay. You stop growing. Eventually, you even start to gain weight. And, for a while, you're a pretty healthy weight. Then, you discover Cool Ranch Doritos.

Lloyd, you need to stay away from Cool Ranch Doritos. Trust me on this.

Here's the next thing: you know that Commodore Vic20 you've been bugging your parents about? The one they say is too expensive? Keep bugging them. And when you get it, learn everything you can about it. Your parents don't understand this, but keeping up with technology is going to be an important survival skill for you. For everybody.

And listen: I know you like to goof around in Miss MacDougall's typing class. Stop it. Learn how to type with more than just four fingers. And, while you're at it, apologize to her for being such a jerk in her class. Teachers work harder than you know.

Speaking of teachers – you're really hard on Mr. Joldersma. Remember how he took your Environmental Science class on a trip to study stream pollution? You think he's some tree-hugging hippie, don't you? You're wrong. Learn everything you can from him. It's going to take 20 years for the rest of the world to be as smart as Mr. Joldersma is, right now. Because he's very wise and very right: we have a duty to be good stewards of God's world – and our environment is very fragile.

On the other hand, the world doesn't blow up in a nuclear holocaust. Which is nice.

I know you're scared of the USSR, but they're long gone. One day they just decided that communism wasn't for them anymore . . . and that was it. Right now you'll find that amazing, but as you grow up you'll realize that people everywhere just want the same thing: to live in peace and grow old with their kids and grandkids.

The big deal these days is China. They make everything in the future, just like Japan does in your time. So study some Mandarin, if you can – because you're going to visit China a few times, and Mandarin is hard.

Now, let's talk about smoking.

It's not cool now. It's going to be way less cool in the future. The only places you'll be allowed to smoke will be outside, in the cold and rain, 20 feet away from any building, shivering like a stray, wet, dog.

Here's the thing: I know you're not going to listen to me. You won't care until you meet your son. Nothing I can say will make you quit before then, but I want to be able to say "I told you so."

I'm running out of time here, Lloyd. So the next ones are going to come fast and furious:

There's a company called "Apple." Buy stocks. And don't sell, even if it looks bad for a while.

Don't get too attached to that skinny leather tie.

Go for a run once in a while. You might like it.

If you're stuck, ask for help. You really don't have all the answers.

Don't run for Student Senate. Take the trip to Wales. Politics will wait. Trust me.

One day in September, you're going to kick John's chair from under him in class. Get both of you sent to the principal's office, and forced to stay late after school. Pick a fight with him if you have to. Just don't let him drive home. Please.

Hug your dad. He hates it. Do it anyway. Tell him you love him, and hug him hard until he says it back. Then remember what it sounds like to hear those words from him. Always.

But remember this, above all: It's going to be alright. The world's going to change fast as you grow up. You're going to be scared sometimes. It's going to be alright. You're going to say goodbye to some people you care about. It's going to be alright. You're going to do some bad things you will regret forever. But God loves you anyway. He's got you.

It's going to be alright.

It's going to be alright.

Lloyd Rang (lloydrang@rogers.com) lives in Bowmanville, Ont.

Former Rwandan minister given life sentence for genocide crimes

Scott Baldauf

Nyiramasuhuko is the first woman to be convicted of genocide.

TANZANIA (CSM) – In the waning days of the Rwandan genocide, scores of ethnic Tutsis took refuge in a provincial government office in the Rwandan town of Butare. And then Pauline Nyiramasuhuko – a Hutu and former minister for family and women affairs – arrived and ordered them all killed.

In a world that had other things on its mind, including a war in Yugoslavia, the crime seemed likely to go unnoticed and unpunished, especially amid the thousands of other similar actions by members of Rwanda's then Hutu-dominated government of the day that led to the genocide of some 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus in April, May and June of 1994.

But on June 24, an international criminal tribunal in Arusha, Tanzania, held Mrs. Nyiramasuhuko accountable for her actions, sentencing her to life imprisonment. Her son Arsene Ntahobali, a former militia leader, and other officials involved in the Butare massacre received the same sentence.

"The chamber convicts Pauline Nyiramasuhuko of conspiracy to commit genocide, crimes against humanity, extermination, rape, persecution and . . . personal dignity," read a ruling by the three judges at the UN's International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, according to Reuters.

The convictions against Nyiramasuhuko come 10 years after the Rwanda tribunal opened in Arusha, Tanzania. Reading out the judgment, presiding Judge William Sekule described the horror of the crimes that were committed.

"Many were physically assaulted, raped, and taken away to various places in Butare, where they were killed," Judge Sekule was quoted by Associated Press as saying. "During the course of these repeated attacks on vulnerable civilians, both Nyiramasuhuko and Ntahobali ordered killings. They also ordered rapes."

First woman convicted

Mrs. Nyiramasuhuko is the first woman to be convicted of genocide charges before an international tribunal, but she is one of a growing string of world leaders, from Yugoslavia to Sudan and Liberia to Kenya, who face trial for human rights crimes committed against their own people.

Tribunals like this one in Tanzania and the main International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague, Netherlands, are a court of last resort for countries whose own legal systems have either broken down or do not have the capacity or will to try individuals for gross violations of human rights.

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Editorials

Not all silence is golden

Angela Reitsma Bick

Once upon a time, a Christian school principal was let go. Parents at the school received a short and cold email informing the community that the principal would "no longer serve as administrator, effective immediately." Since it was a personnel issue, the Board could not comment further. Teachers at the school knew nothing more. Perhaps the Board thought that without details, the story had no legs. But who can help wondering what happened? Why so secretive? There was probably more speculation about possible scenarios than there would have been if the reasons were spelled out from the beginning. Parents at the school felt like children who had been told, "You wouldn't understand." Would the truth have made anyone think less of the people involved? I don't think so. Maybe it would have helped in understanding some of the issues at stake in Christian education today.

A subsequent note clarified that the law required the Board's confidentiality as an employer. Clearly, there's no easy way to end a relationship, within a family or an organization. But it's too bad that broken relationships within the Christian community are handled no better than they are elsewhere. It's too bad that parents at the school couldn't shoulder the sorrow or pray for specific healing in that situation.

Telling it slant

This spring, the executive director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA), Rev. Jerry Dykstra, was let go. Details emerged bit by bit. The first CRC Newsroom press release (printed in *Christian Courier* April 25) said that "Rev. Dykstra has informed the CRC Board of Trustees of his desire to resign . . . for personal and family reasons." Agency was placed fully on Dykstra in this article while the Board was portrayed as passive: they agreed, accepted the resignation, expressed respect and appreciation.

An article in the May *Banner*, however, clarified that although the decision was mutual, Dykstra "didn't go to the meeting planning to resign." Sounds strange. Who resigns on the spot for personal reasons?

Well, not Rev. Dykstra, as a report to Synod in June finally made clear. An advisory committee explained that, after a performance review, the Board actually asked him to resign. Then both parties signed a mutual non-disparagement agreement, limiting what they could say in public. They also agreed to say that the resignation was for personal and family reasons. Did they pray to be led by the Holy Spirit before making that misleading announcement?

Reaction among CRC members to the report given at Synod has not been positive. Many people genuinely want to know the truth – not necessarily to fuel gossip, as some suggest, but to be better supports. It's too bad that the Board of Trustees felt it couldn't entrust church members with the whole story. It's too bad that a mutual non-disparagement agreement was necessary. And it's really heart-breaking that Christian Board members deal in doublespeak and dance around litigation fears exactly like leaders in other organizations.

The gospel truth

I don't know "Ned," an online contributor to the CRCNA's comments section during Synod, but I love his comparison: "One of the things I've always appreciated about the biblical narrative," he writes, "is its honesty. I suppose the gospel writer could have related the story of Peter's denial of Jesus by saying 'There was an incident involving a disciple who had a temporary falling out with the leadership. Following an interview, the contents of which are strictly confidential, he was restored to his old position and promised future considerations.' I'm glad that the logic of our BOT and ED and now our Synod wasn't applied in the case of Adam and Eve, King David, Paul and countless others whose transgressions were brought to light within its pages."

Ned has an excellent point. We are all sinners, and our lives reflect the brokenness of the world around us. There's no way to whitewash that. And yet the Bible touches lives despite – or because of – its authentic, broken characters.

Angela Reitsma Bick (editor@christiancourier.ca) is Editor of Christian Courier.

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Energy saver or eyesore: the wind power conundrum

Adele Konyndyk

Before my family and I pulled into our cottage in the Huron country town of Goderich, Ontario, we passed a large field of wind-powered electrical generators – a "wind farm." I didn't know the exact function of these massive, almost alien-like machines then, but knew the words forming in my mind to describe their appearance – *obtrusive, unnatural, abnormal . . . ugly.*

It's been over five years since I've looked on the towering bodies and swirling propellers of those wind turbines. I now, however, fully understand their environmental function: to convert kinetic energy into mechanical energy – wind power. Few would dispute the need for clean energy sources to help lessen Canada's dependency on fossil fuels. Yet plans to install more wind farms throughout Canada have stirred up strong opposition. Why?

As *Globe and Mail* columnist Neil Reynolds notes, most anti-wind farm arguments hinge on their "disturbing" presence. People are bothered by the whooshing sound the windmills emit and concerned about birds killed in their propellers. Some claim that the wind farms are connected to health problems, such as chronic sleep loss and headaches. After citing a Canadian Wind Farm poll that lists ugliness and size as top concerns, however, Reynolds concludes: "The No. 1 problem with wind farms . . . is aesthetics."

To oppose factories that churn out chemical plumes seems a widely acceptable action. But how are we to react to inventions that help to preserve God's creation yet lessen its visual beauty? Is it a peculiar kind of vanity to oppose environmentally friendly eyesores?

The pro-turbine comments posted after Reynolds' online piece testify to the divergent views that make up aesthetics – the study of beauty's creation and its appreciation. Some people use adjectives such as "elegant" and "sleek" to defend the turbine's appearance. Others describe them as symbols of technological progress and environmental responsibility. For many, it seems the functional "beauty" of wind turbines outweighs their lack of visual beauty.

Tilting at windmills

I came away from Reynolds' article eager to position myself in the pro- or anti-wind farm camp, but I am sympathetic to both views. I can appreciate, for example, the views of the online commenters who don't believe the issue is *purely* aesthetic. I am wary, though, of doing away with visual impact discussion altogether. If wind farms popped up throughout my city (Hamilton, Ontario) and altered the Niagara escarpment that I've come to admire, I know I would be saddened. I would lament the loss of a sight I loved, even if for an environmental purpose. I would hope that I could express that view without being called vain or simplistic.

Although I doubt Hamilton will actually see wind farm installations in coming years, the fast growing nature of wind power throughout the country proves that many communities continue to confront the issue. The Canadian Wind Energy Association has a strategy that aims to have 20 percent of the country's energy needs filled by wind power by 2025. Currently, Canada's largest wind power installation is in the township of Melancthon, Ontario. In recent years, though, plans for even larger farms have been approved in both Manitoba and Alberta. These have been met with strong opposition from local residents. Regardless, wind power is clearly, in some form, here to stay in Canada.

Even if a universally pleasing solution to the wind turbine problem is not attainable, we can still explore the aesthetic dimension with thoughtful, imaginative minds. Reynolds' article closes with a call to alter the current modern turbine into the Dutch windmill model – a move he sees as a solution to the problem of turbine aesthetics. It's a good reminder that culture, too, plays a role in informing an aesthetic sensibility.

For me, the wind power aesthetics discussion highlights God's multifaceted call to care for the world. I typically associate aesthetics with literary, musical or visual arts. Until recently I hadn't given thought to serious conflicts between the practical and the picturesque.

I believe that Christians, as followers of a supremely creative God, are required to care deeply about the way our world appears. This calling extends to our experience as caretakers of creation to our role as creators of cities, worship spaces and Christian institutions. All are issues to be approached with imagination, humility and the understanding that: "In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind" (Job 12:10). The wind power discussion can certainly serve to broaden our perspective on how to celebrate the earth's physical beauty while also stewarding its natural resources.

Adele Konyndyk (AdeleKonyndyk@gmail.com) is a freelance writer and a member of First Hamilton Christian Reformed Church. She holds an MFA in creative writing from Seattle Pacific University, with an emphasis in fiction, and is an unabashed BBC mini-series adorer.

Letters

Oh for a thousand tongues to sing

Thank you for an exciting discussion of the ways that language works in the life of God's world (June 13 *Christian Courier*). The front page article, "Listening to the world's last speakers," struck a chord and reminded me of J. Edward Chamberlin's book *If This is Your Land, Where are Your Stories*? Chamberlin claims that the stories of the people who dwell in the land are part of its shape, its topography. And within this framework he does the same thing the article does: parallels the way languages are becoming extinct with the disappearing life of some species of animals. It is our idea of progress, he argues, that makes us indifferent to these losses, giving us a twisted view of what is "natural," a view that affects our response to both disappearing languages and species. I really like the following quote:

> "Why not let things take their natural course and encourage the survival of the fittest language? What would be lost, other than a few species? Admittedly, there aren't that many species of languages, but there are lots of varieties . . . and some of them . . . might eventually become new species if the conditions are right. The trouble is that the 'right' conditions are often the product of force. . . . The language that wins out is sometimes the one with the army. And we know that while some languages survive all sorts of violence, some do not. And others just slip away, less counted than spotted owls" (16).

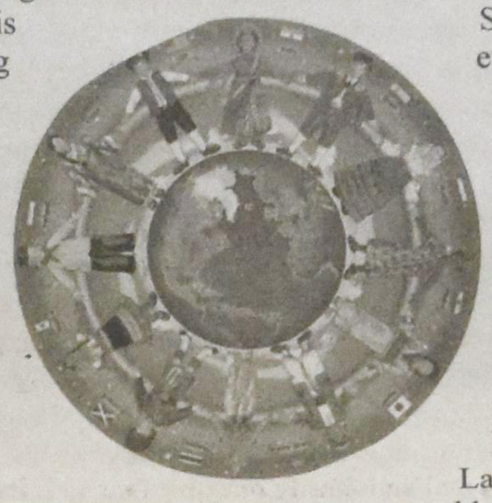
This brings up the important question of how the force of globalization travels largely via the English language. Wierenga and Reitsma Bick both point to how, through language, a culture expresses its experience and understanding. *Genesis* shows us what pleasure God took in creating diversity within creation and among people. After the multitude of languages was silenced by the one language that was used at Babel for building a monolithic structure that would trumpet human accomplishment, God was again pleased, this time, to mix things up so that when the people opened their mouths to ask for the next load of bricks, all kinds of languages came spilling out. The "icing was put on the cake" when at Pentecost God was pleased to fill the mouths of the apostles with many languages so that the mass of people gathered could hear of God's marvels each in their own tongue.

God's story has a radically different message than the "survival of the fittest language" message. What might these moves by God have to say to us English speakers who want to be part of God's redeeming story in this world, we who sing "Oh for a thousand tongues to sing, Our great Redeemer's praise"?

Agnes Kramer-Hamstra
St. Stephen, N.B.

The inevitable rise and fall of languages

Nearly every language spoken in Europe 1,000 years ago has disappeared. Surprised? You shouldn't be. In 1,000 years, a language is likely to change so much that it will become a new language. For instance, the main language in Britain 1,000 years ago was Anglo-Saxon. No Brit living today could understand it without prior study. In the Netherlands 1,000 years ago, various dialects of Oudnederlands were being spoken. None of them would be comprehensible to us today.



Since every language is bound to disappear through change eventually, why is the disappearance of small languages through displacement by a larger one such a calamity, as Emily Wierenga (June 13 *Christian Courier*) and so many others think? Disappearance is disappearance, regardless of whether it occurs by displacement or through change.

Linguists want to preserve every language, however small, but at the same time they are always urging us to accept linguistic change as inevitable.

The cumulative impact of linguistic changes, however, will be to create new languages. For instance, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, French and Rumanian are still called Latin languages, but no speaker of these modern languages could understand the Romans. Latin has effectively disappeared as a spoken language through change, and so has classical Greek. The position of the linguists is inconsistent.

I can understand perfectly that the speakers of an endangered language will lament its loss, but why should it also be felt as a loss by the rest of mankind? It is true that each language has some unique features, but these features cannot enrich the lives of people who do not speak the language. We can only be enriched by something if it has an impact on our lives.

Fewer than 100 languages have more than 10 million speakers, and fewer than 200 have more than 1 million speakers. It is very hard for a language with fewer than a million speakers to become or remain a *cultuurtaal* – that is, a language that can be used from kindergarten to doctoral studies, in the kitchen as well as in a science lab. If a language can't become a *cultuurtaal,* it will be endangered if its speakers want to join the modern world.

James Schipper
London, Ont.

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News

Further CRC Synod news

New officebearers 'covenant' rejected

Marian Van Til, *with files from CRCNA*

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. – The Christian Reformed Church synod last month declined to adopt a proposed new "Form of Subscription" for church officebearers. Pastors, elders and deacons must sign the current form which says they believe and will defend the historic Christian creeds (Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian) and Reformed confessions (the Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dort and Belgic Confession).

A version of the form must also be signed by faculty who work at Calvin College and Calvin seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Unlike the other colleges/universities which are often seen as Christian Reformed but are independently owned and run (among them Dordt and Redeemer), Calvin College and Seminary are owned by the church and overseen by its general synod.

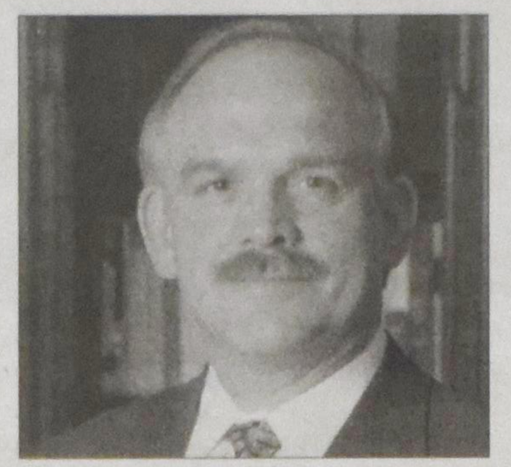
The Form of Subscription became an issue when some officebearers decided they didn't want to sign it because they don't entirely agree with the Confessions. So some church councils simply quit using the form. That was six years and two denominational study committees ago. The first study results were presented to synod in 2008 and were rejected; the second study came before synod this year.

Hot debate

After a spirited debate – some would say "heated" – the 2011 study was also rejected. Instead, another study committee was appointed to refine a new "Covenant for Officebearers."

The issue crystalized into two clear sides: delegates favouring the increased openness of the proposed new "covenant," and delegates concerned that the new form requires less of officebearers and de-emphasizes biblical beliefs as they are laid out in the Reformed Confessions.

Some felt that the current form is too "defensive" and "restrictive," and its emphasis is too much on historical and theological "preservation." Others, like Calvin College President Gaylen Byker, believed it would be a "major mistake" to adopt the new form. Byker quoted a statement by a Calvin professor who had experience in Catholic universities. The professor cited the quick erosion of faith in the Catholic universities which began to ask their faculties only to refrain from public criticism of the church but did not require them to agree with church teaching.



President Gaylen Byker.

Byker and the prof he quoted saw the proposed covenant as having the same kind of "agree-not-to-disagree tone." The statement concluded, "If the CRC is not going to embrace the particularity of Reformed confessional tradition as a gift and a strength, then we might as well fold up shop and head for the nondenominational evangelical church down the street."

Another person who argued against the new covenant was John Cooper, professor of philosophical theology at Calvin Seminary. He cited the rise of the New Calvinism and how Calvinism is drawing in new people, including many young people. He mentioned Tim Keller, influential pastor of the huge Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan (New York City). "I like Keller, I like the fact that he can make *Time* magazine, that Calvinism makes *Time* magazine as something that young people are taking seriously. And just at that time, we're backing off on our enthusiasm in our willingness to defend it?"

In the end, in rejecting the proposal, synod asked a new study committee to come back next year with a covenant that answers "the need for positive, declarative commitments to teach, defend and actively promote the confessions and Reformed doctrine of the CRCNA." In addition, the new covenant should "strengthen the scope and the binding nature of the commitment . . . and the need to reword the description of the gospel in a way that avoids the impression of universalism."

CRC Synod news wrap-up

Synod accepts new translations of Reformed Confessions

Marian Van Til, *with files from CRCNA*

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. Jun 15, 2011 – Synod 2011 agreed to accept the new translations of the Reformed Confessions which were brought to it via a multidenominational committee of members from the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), the Reformed Church in America (RCA) and the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA).

The Heidelberg Catechism, Canons of Dort and Belgic Confession are the "three forms of unity" that grew out of the Calvinist wing of the 16th century Reformation. They are still (nominally, at least) the doctrinal standards of virtually all Calvinist churches.

Most of the translation revisions involved eliminating male pronouns referring to all of humankind and reducing the number of male pronouns used to refer to God. Some delegates objected to the latter. Joseph Vanden Akker (pastor, Classis Minnkota) said, "The Bible liberally uses masculine pronouns for God. So if we're not going to follow the example of God, it seems we should have good reasons not to." In fact, synod received many overtures from classes and churches who objected to that kind of revision. But the majority of delegates were not swayed by their arguments.

The Bible translation used in the revised translations is not the New International Version (NIV) which the CRC uses but the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) used by the RCA and PCUSA. Some delegates questioned that. Others warned against changing the language of Scripture because of a perception that it would make the church "current or more acceptable."

As long as there is call for them, the previous version(s) of the Confessions will still be available from Faith Alive Resources (the CRC's publishing arm), as separate entities and in the back of the current edition of the *Psalter Hymnal.*

Ironically, the revised translation project was undertaken for use in the as yet unpublished joint CRC-RCA hymnal, but Synod 2011 decided that that hymnal should be strictly a hymnal and should not contain both hymns/psalms and the Confessions.

Archbishop: Catholic institutions losing religious identity

DENVER, Colorado (CNA/EWTN News) – The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Denver, Charles J. Chaput, recently warned Catholic social workers against the danger of church institutions losing their religious identity amidst increasing hostility from the government and society.

At a June 21 address to the Catholic Social Workers National Convention in Denver, the archbishop said, "The more that Catholic universities or hospitals mute their religious identity, the more that Catholic social ministries weaken their religious character, the less useful to the Gospel they become." He urged Catholic social workers to not let their Christian identity wane.

Chaput also stressed that the government has no right to impede their work. He made his remarks against the backdrop of Catholic Charities in several dioceses across the U.S. shutting down adoption and foster care services after their local states enacted civil-union laws for homosexual partners and being forced to adopt children to those homosexual couples.

Despite these setbacks, Chaput said that Catholic ministries "have the duty to faithfully embody Catholic beliefs on marriage, the family, social justice, sexuality, abortion and other important issues. And if the state refuses to allow those Catholic ministries to be faithful in their services through legal or financial bullying, then as a matter of integrity, they should end their services."

The archbishop minced no words. "Catholic social ministry begins and ends with Jesus Christ. If it doesn't, it isn't Catholic. And if our social work isn't deeply, confidently and explicitly Catholic in its identity, then we should stop using the word 'Catholic.' It's that simple."

A new kind of America

Chaput warned that "a new kind of America" is emerging in the 21st century, one likely to be "much less friendly to religious faith than anything in the nation's past." That's because "America's religious soul – its Christian subtext – has been weakening for decades."

The archbishop observed that religious communities have historically had a great deal of power in shaping attitudes and behavior in the U.S. "And that's why, if you dislike religion or resent the Catholic Church, or just want to reshape American life into some new kind of experiment, you need to use the state to break the influence of the Church and her ministries."

In the years ahead, religious communities will encounter more attempts by civil authorities to interfere and will find less "unchallenged space" to carry out their work in the public square, he said. "It's already happening." All the more reason why "no one in Catholic social work can afford to be lukewarm about his faith."

Chaput admitted that he "painted a pretty stark picture of the America we may face in the next few decades. But we shouldn't lose heart, even for a minute. Our job is to let God change us, and then to help God, through our actions, to change the lives of others. That's what we'll be held accountable for, and it's very much within our ability – if we remain faithful to who we are as believers."

News

Analysis:
Uzbek Christians suffer as regime tightens noose

TASHKENT, Uzbekistan (WEA-RLC) – At least four incidents of Christian persecution were reported from the former Soviet country of Uzbekistan in late June. A Christian woman was beaten into concussion, another woman was fined $1,465 by a court for giving the New Testament to a child, a Christian man was threatened with axe attack by a police official and another man was assaulted by police.

The spurt can be linked to renewed attempts to maintain hold on power and the communist legacy in this most populous country of Central Asia. Uzbekistan has a population of 28 million with a Sunni majority.

The objectives of President Islam Karimov, who has remained in office through controversial referendums since 1991, can be met only under an authoritarian rule under which the executive has powers over all other state institutions, including the judiciary.

While the people of Uzbekistan have not emulated the ongoing "peoples' revolutions" in the Middle East and North Africa, President Karimov sees his people as a threat. The conditions that led to the wave of revolutions late last year and earlier this year – poverty, corruption, unemployment and authoritarianism – all exist in Uzbekistan. Observers say Karimov is leaving no stone unturned to pre-empt any attempt by the people of his country to plan a revolt.

Two years ago, in May and August 2009, Karimov intensified restrictions on civil rights under the pretext of fighting Islamist extremism after the Islamic Jihad Union targeted government installations in the Fergana Valley and the national capital of Tashkent. Since then, Karimov has projected the threat from Islamism as an excuse for the restrictions.

During President Karimov's previous crackdown in 2005 hundreds of people were killed by security forces. Demonstrators were detained and tortured. A severe restriction on expression and manifestation of political dissent and the freedom of the press soon followed and became a *de-facto* policy.

But religious persecution predates both those developments. In 1998 Karimov's government enacted a law making registration mandatory for all religious groups. Its tedious criteria and procedures ensured that the government could use its own discretion to allow or refuse registration to organizations.

Two-edged sword

Called the "Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations," the legislation granted freedom of worship, freedom from religious persecution and the right to establish educational institution only to registered groups. It banned activities that were perceived to be conflicting with national security, such as proselytism, religious instruction in schools, private religious teaching and publishing and distribution of religious literature without license.

The law developed strict and arduous criteria for registration and declared all non-state registered religious activities a criminal offence. Section 2 of article 217 of the criminal code and article 201 of the administrative code imposed fines for repeat offenses under the religion law up to 300 times the minimum monthly wage of approximately $25.

During the Soviet era, religion was merely stifled – and was not dead – in communist countries under the Soviet Union. Post-independence, religious communities were expected to emerge as a major force. That compelled President Karimov to gain

Pres. Islam Karimov has executive powers over all other state institutions, including the judiciary.

control and authority over all religious activities in the country.

Apart from restrictions, the government of Uzbekistan also runs media campaigns against the Christians. For example, state-owned television has shown films promoting hate against the religious minorities that seek to share their faith with others. As a result many converts face societal opposition. But generally, persecution of Christians in Uzbekistan comes from the State and not society.

Self-interest wins

Geopolitics, thanks to Uzbekistan's natural resources and its potential role in the global war against terror, has helped President Karimov to maintain and get away with his authoritarian rule. The European Union, one of the most influential among foreign powers in the region, imposed sanctions on Uzbekistan in November 2005 in response to the government's violent crackdown on the 2005 uprising and its refusal to accept an international investigation. However, the sanctions were eased soon thereafter despite the Uzbek government's refusal to budge. This was apparently due to Brussels' competition with Russia and China in gaining a larger share of Central Asia's energy resources.

Most recently, in February 2011, the European Council approved an amendment to the EU's Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Uzbekistan, extending customs and tariffs breaks to that country and opening up European markets to Uzbek cotton.

President Karimov has shrewdly sought to showcase reforms by enacting new legislations while at the same time subverting the spirit of reform measures by enacting conflicting laws. While the constitution provides for freedom of religion and separation of religion and state, the 1998 law severely restricts religious freedom. Similarly, while Uzbekistan abolished the death penalty and ratified the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 2008, the incidence of disappearance and torture of political dissidents and violations of civil and political rights remains high.

At home, Karimov portrays diplomatic efforts by other countries towards ensuring respect for human rights and their accusations of violations as part of "an information war" by the "enemies" to legitimise "intervention" into the country's "internal affairs."

In the midst of President Karimov's constant reluctance to grant civil rights and promote party politics and his ability to minimize international pressure, the Christians as well as other religious organizations, independent journalists, human rights activists and political activists continue to suffer.

Netherlands:
Wilders acquitted of hatred against Muslims

AMSTERDAM (CCO) – Geert Wilders, leader of the Dutch Freedom Party, has been acquitted of "inciting contempt" against Muslims. He was charged in January of 2009. His trial began a year later after judges of the court in Amsterdam ruled that the case should be heard, despite a decision by the public prosecutors' office not to pursue it.

Wilders was prosecuted for referring to Islam as a fascist ideology. But Judge Marcel van Oosten ruled that Wilders' public statements on that score were "acceptable within the context of public debate."

Wilders had stressed that his statement was a criticism of the Islamic faith, not of any individuals. He greeted the court verdict with satisfaction, telling supporters that he was relieved to know that public criticism of Islam remains legal in the Netherlands. The court's decision, he said, was "a victory for freedom of expression."

He added, "Now the good news is that it's also legal to be critical about Islam, to speak publicly in a critical way about Islam and this is something that we need because the Islamization of our societies is a major problem and a threat to our freedom and I'm allowed to say so."

John Tyler, political editor at Radio Netherlands said, "This is a precedent-setting case that now allows people to feel like they can say more than they felt they could say before. The acquittal of Geert Wilders has big implications for free speech in the Netherlands."

Reformed prison ministry expands to Mexico

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich./BURLINGTON, Ont. (CBI-CRCNA) – Crossroad Bible Institute has announced the opening of CBI México North, its 13th international satellite campus. Based in Ciudad Juárez, CBI México North offers the promise of peace in Christ to those incarcerated in a city dominated by violence, warfare and chaos.

Crossroad Bible Institute is a prison ministry in its 26th year of operation. With 40,000 students, CBI has satellite campuses on six continents and several openings pending. The program is provided at no cost to prisoners and their families and is approved for support by the Christian Reformed Church.

In 2007, prior to the turf war between the Juárez and Sinaloa drug cartels that began the following year, Juárez saw 300 homicides. That number grew to 3,000 by 2010. As of early 2011, the city averaged eight homicides a day. Although the death toll lessened slightly this spring, it remains high as the drug cartels fight for control of smuggling routes and corruption runs rampant.

Not surprisingly, violence permeates the prison environment as well. But CBI's new satellite campus, led by Emmanuel Sandoval Ramos, offers a hopeful alternative.

Director Sandoval became familiar with Crossroad through his studies at All Nations Seminary. Students at the seminary serve as CBI Instructors, an effort facilitated by Jeananne and Dan Kuiper, missionaries with Christian Reformed World Missions, through CBI's Seminarian Program.

The first CBI students are incarcerated in CERESO Prison in Juárez. Most are part of a vibrant prison church that meets within the facility, and they use what they learn through the Crossroad program to disciple others within their congregation. Many have directed family members on the outside to Sandoval's church, which has received them with open arms.

Sandoval explains, "The leaders of CERESO Prison see the materials as being very good and useful. We know the blessing this discipleship will bring to the city."

CBI President Dr. David Schuringa notes, "We are pleased to have this satellite campus up and running in a city that demonstrates such a great need, and we are thrilled by students' eagerness to be discipled and, in turn, to disciple others."

Columns

Principalities & Powers

David Koyzis

'A little lower than the angels'

Several years ago I read a report of a genetic study indicating that we human beings share 99.4 percent of "functionally important DNA" with chimpanzees, prompting some to think they should thus be reclassified as members of our own genus, *Homo*. Other studies have more "modestly" set the degree of genetic similarity at 96 percent. Humans and chimps are estimated by scientists to have diverged from a common ancestor some six to seven million years ago, ostensibly through the Darwinian mechanism of natural selection. This has prompted some to argue that the differences between human beings and their fellow primates are merely those of degree rather than kind.

However, there are two problems with this conclusion, the first of which applies to Christians and the second of which concerns everyone.

First, the Bible teaches that human beings are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27, 9:6), something further unpacked in Psalm 8 ("you have made them a little lower than the angels") and in the apocryphal book of Sirach (17:1-14). Theologians have long disputed the meaning of this divine image. At the very least it implies that God has granted human beings a special authority as stewards over the remainder of his creation. Reformed Christians have long made much of the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:28-29), whereby God's image-bearers are called to "be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

And rightly so. Human beings are uniquely called to respond to God's love. Nonhuman creation cannot help but obey God's law for them. Dogs bark. Pigs wallow in the mud. Eagles fly. All of these behave by instinct in their own distinctive creaturely ways. Not so with humans. To be sure, we are subject to instincts. But we also function logically, economically, aesthetically, jurally, ethically and in the aspect of faith in conscious obedience or disobedience to God's norms.

Monkeys typing *Hamlet*

Second, our own experience confirms this teaching of scripture. We human beings build cities, with their complex patterns of residential dwellings, workplaces and places of worship, along with the transportation and communication infrastructures connecting them. We create great and not-so-great art. We evaluate such art, distinguishing genuine art from mere kitsch. We sing songs, write poetry and tell stories. We come up with philosophies and scientific theories. We profess love to each other in intricate ways unique to our various cultures. We also come up with diabolically clever ways to insult each other, through wit and sarcasm.

We form elaborate social networks and organize a variety of specialized communities, each with its own task. We are embedded in families and marriages. We are citizens of states, members of church communions, participants in choral groups and amateur football clubs. We fashion public legal codes encompassing criminal and civil matters, as well as internal laws governing other commun-ities. With such activity we have left our unmistakably human mark on the earth, from the Great Wall of China to the lighted cities visible from our satellites orbiting overhead.

Those who would minimize the differences between human beings on the one hand and chimps and bonobos on the other must account for the fact that these apparently "related" species have not created philosophies and theologies, farms and villages, music and lyrics, evening gowns and dress shoes, tractors and dump trucks. Nor have they even come close to conducting a study comparing our DNA to their own.

In short, our experience as human beings confirms scriptural teaching from a number of angles. We are created in God's image and are thus invested with a unique authority over his world. The best scientific theories will not try to deny this rich variegated reality but will joyfully acknowledge it in such a way as to give due honour to our Creator and Redeemer.

David T. Koyzis (dkoyzis@redeemer.ca)is on a sabbatical leave from Redeemer University College, Ancaster, Ontario, and is completing a book on authority, office and the image of God.

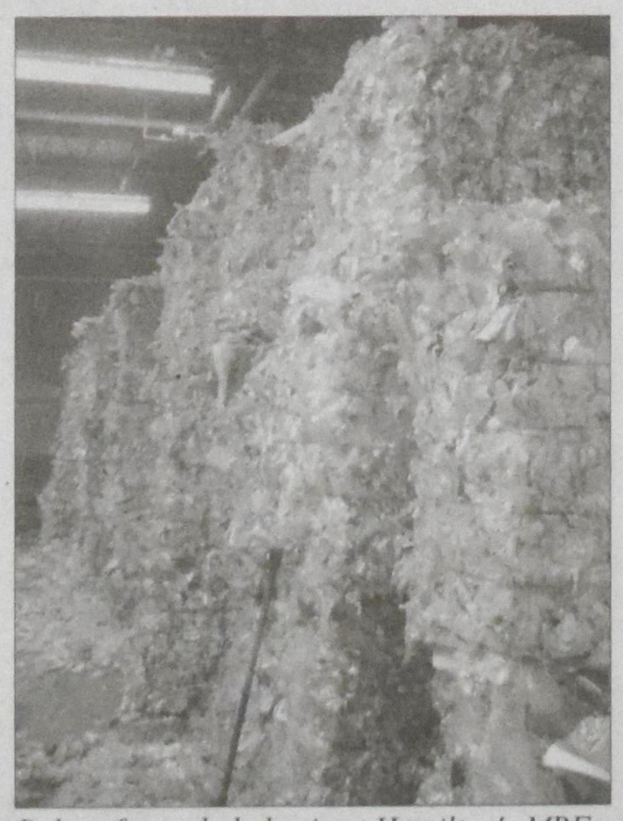
Technically Speaking

Derek Schuurman

Long before the blue box: Faith and sustainable technology

According to Statistics Canada, Canadians generated 35 mega tonnes of solid waste in 2006. Despite this staggering statistic, there are signs of hope. Blue boxes are now commonplace, capturing materials such as paper, plastic, glass and cans for recycling. I have visited the local Hamilton Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) where the contents of all the blue boxes across the city are collected. I was astonished by the scale of recyclable goods that are sorted in a city the size of Hamilton. Like a combine harvests a field, materials pour into one end of the facility, and large bales of sorted plastics and cans are spit out at the other end. Organic materials collected in the city's green carts are processed in buildings that are effectively giant, high-tech compost bins, producing marketable compost in four to six weeks.

These are small steps forward, considering it wasn't long ago that everything, including paper, cans, plastics and egg shells, was placed in the garbage, destined for a landfill. In engineering school a little over 20 years ago, I don't recall ever hearing any talk about sustainability. Now some leading engineering schools, like McMaster University, have made sustainable engineering education and research one of their strategic goals (see **eng.mcmaster.ca/sustainability)**. This is an encouraging development; educating those who will be engineering our future products is necessary to bring about change. Sustainability must be more than an afterthought. Already in the design stage, engineers must consider how a product will eventually be disposed and how materials may be recovered or recycled. Numerous products, including electronic devices, remain currently difficult to recycle or reuse.



Bales of recycled plastic at Hamilton's MRF.

Although an exact definition of sustainable development is a matter of debate, in 1987 a United Nations commission defined it this way: "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Recycling is one way to help meet future needs by recovering material and energy that would otherwise be lost.

There is no silver bullet when it comes to sustainability, but a reasonable goal is to live each year in a more sustainable way than the previous year. This can be accomplished through public policies and corporate goals that embrace a "triple bottom line," which extends the limited notion of profit in terms of finances to include "people, planet and profit." It represents a move towards a more holistic view of flourishing – a recognition that social, economic and environmental realities are interconnected.

A Christian vanguard

Notions that recognize the interconnected aspects of flourishing include elements of *shalom*. Neil Plantinga writes that "shalom implies right relationships with God, with other humans, with nature and with oneself. Shalom brings with it the idea of fullness, well-being and sustainable living." To be sure, shalom is about more than the environment, but it does include "right relationships with nature." It should not surprise us that people are discovering that sustainability makes sense – it's the way that the world was made to work.

But Christians don't always have a reputation for environmental stewardship. In fact, it has been argued that the blame for our environmental problems ought to be laid at the feet of Christianity. An influential article by Lynn White, entitled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," blames Christianity for our current environmental crisis. White claims that the creation story discarded previous notions about the sacredness of nature and led to attitudes of mastery and dominion through technology. It's true that Christians have fallen short, but the scriptures are clear on our call to be stewards of God's world.

Churches could start modelling how to be more sustainable in how they operate. This can start with recycling and reducing the mountains of printed materials that are distributed in church mailboxes. Styrofoam cups can be avoided and churches can purchase coffee and other products from socially responsible vendors, even if it costs more. Some churches have even gone so far as to install solar panels on their roofs or install geo-thermal heating and cooling. Some have helped turn vacant urban spaces into thriving community gardens.

There is something appropriate about Christians being on the forefront of sustainability. If engineering schools and municipalities are moving in this direction, what can we as Christians do? Rather than being accused of being the "root of our ecological crisis," Christians ought to model responsible earth-keeping and to bring this aspect of shalom a little nearer.

Dr. Derek Schuurman (dschuur@cs.redeemer.ca) teaches at Redeemer University College and has recently been doing some research and publishing on using computers' vision to sort recyclable goods.

Reviews

Becoming more human?

Harold and **Heather Alkema**

Jean Vanier was born into privilege as the son of a future Governor General. It was, however, also a difficult time; early on in his life he enlisted in the Canadian Navy and fought in World War Two. After that conflict ended, he began, as he said, to search for a new way to peace. Eventually, with the support of Christian friends, he decided he would dedicate his life to helping people with intellectual challenges. This journey began when he took up residence with two men who had spent most of their lives in asylums. For these men, rejection, ridicule and even physical abuse had characterized their daily experience. Yet as Vanier began to treat them with compassion and understanding, he became more aware of his own humanity. Vanier, whose model of support for people with developmental challenges eventually became the foundation for the international organization *L'Arche,* began, as he describes, to "become more human."

"To become human... means to become men and women with the wisdom of love. For this, we often need help." - Jean Vanier

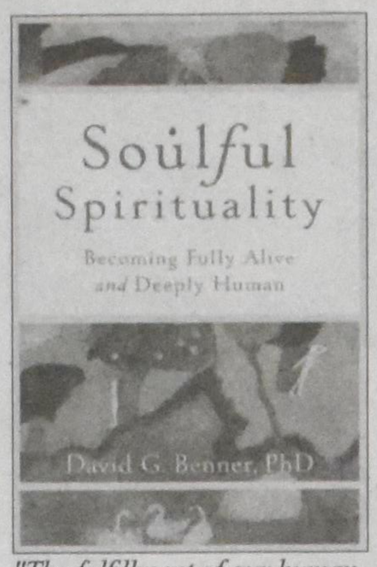
Deeply human

This Easter my wife and I were encouraged to reflect more deeply on the death and resurrection of Christ. It is often difficult to grasp the real implications of those events for our lives as Christians. Psychologist and theologian David Benner's book, *Soulful Spirituality,* allowed us to think about the opportunity to become more fully human and thus share more deeply in the benefits of Christ's triumph over death. Benner, like Vanier, believes that new possibilities for human life were central to Christ's ministry on earth and his continued work in and through us, pointing to Jesus' declaration that the reason he came was to bring abundant life and to help people live that life to the full.

We often assume that our very existence makes us both human and alive automatically. We do not, however, contemplate what those terms mean in the best sense. For Benner, understanding our potential as human beings is a process of learning and becoming. It is a lifelong journey in which we become more like Christ. As we progress along this path, we start to show the attributes of Christ more and more. We begin to demonstrate compassion, kindness and love for our fellow human-beings. As we grow in faith and humanity, we are able to address the problems of our everyday life and the world.

Fully alive

In Benner's view, the fully-alive Christian is a person that uses the gift of life to help others, and, in a small way, deal with the problems of world. To achieve this goal the individual must be able to integrate his or her passions, intellect and faith. As we become more fully alive in Christ our passions become more and more godly. This is what he means by the process of integrating passion and faith. As we increase in knowledge and love of God, we begin to take pleasure in his will being accomplished in the world and in sharing his love with others.



"The fulfillment of our humanity never happens automatically. Nor does it ever occur apart from certain core spiritual ways of living." (xii)

Obstacles in the path

Growth is difficult. It does not take place without intentional effort, and there are many forces in the world that tempt us to be inauthentic and turn our back on God. If our contemporary society supports belief at all, it is as a private activity that emphasizes the spirit and the mind. But Benner encourages us to give real and physical expression to our faith. It is his hope that our faith makes a difference in our lives, in the lives of others and, collectively, in the world. Benner admits that this approach to spirituality can bring us in contact with the dark side of our nature, the physical nature that includes "the painful, messy and confusing parts of life." But he also suggests that as we move forward in our Christian maturation, God supports, helps and protects us. He grants us belonging and safety in spite of our weakness.

Divine transformation

The process of growing in Christian humanity is never an easy one. Vanier had to face the battlefields of World War Two. When he decided to dedicate his life to others, the men he supported bore many scares (both physiological and physical) from the sad and violent institution they had inhabited. Christ faced rejection, torture and a painful death on the cross before hyis resurrection and ascension. Yet even as we face the most frightening aspects of this life, somehow God's love uses such experiences to transform us into the people he wants to be – people who are deeply human, capable of giving and receiving his love.

Soulful Spirituality: Becoming Fully Alive and Deeply Human
by David Benner.
Ada, MI: Brazos Press, 2010

Harold Alkema (hjalkema75@hotmail.com) is a Public Policy student at Carleton University. He lives in Ottawa with his wife Heather, who is a social worker.

Why we tell stories: tales from one man's life

Nick Schuurman

Fifty stories.

Not a memoir, not an autobiography, not an historical account. Just fifty tales from the well-traveled suitcase of a storyteller's memory. That storyteller is a certain Leendert Kooij, a man no doubt familiar to many *Christian Courier* readers, and these stories paint a picture of childhood in Holland, and youth spent in the radical transition of immigration.

Difficult years

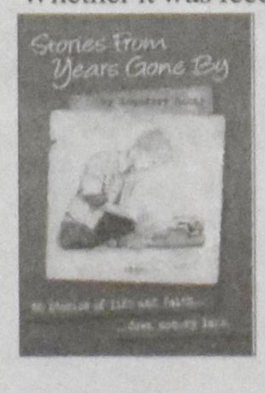
Kooij, like so many others, lived through no few dark days. World War II, the "Hunger Winter," life in a nation limping under a struggling economy, and the difficulties of immigration would, in my mind, be reason enough to start these stories with the old cliché, "when I was your age." My generation does not understand the kind of life our parents and grandparents faced. For the most part, we live comfortably in worlds sheltered from the realities of war, hunger and poverty.

Kooij, however, chooses not to write with the patronizing tone one might expect. There is, in fact, an almost infectious joy in his writing. He describes times of difficulty for what they are, but throughout it all expresses immense gratitude at the simple pleasures he remembers and retells: a salted herring wrapped in newspaper, an old sweater, a mother's bedtime stories. This sense of contentment and enjoyment in the midst of scarcity is one of the book's gifts to younger generations, whose propensity to stockpile in search of happiness has left us as restless as ever.

Simple faith

Throughout these stories, he recalls the resilience of his family's simple, earthy faith. "That is the way things were back then," echoes his refrain; "we just trusted that God would provide." Like the Psalmist retracing the points of grace in Israel's history, Kooij recalls, with holy glee, God's faithful provision in its unlikely and unexpected forms. In this sense, the book forms a hymnbook of playful doxologies and indeed ought to be read as devotion.

Trust, however, is no excuse for idleness, and these stories reflect the deep-rooted work ethic of the Dutch immigrant community. Whether it was feeding chickens on a neighbour's farm, harvesting potatoes during summer break or shoveling snow to save up money for skates, he expresses a sense of satisfaction for work well done, and a sense of joy for the chance to do so. Again, even in the midst of a recession, I am not sure my generation understands the commitment to labour that is retold in these stories.



Stories From Years Gone By
by Leendert Kooij.
Toronto, ON: Leendert Kooij Records and Books, 2010. *See ad on page 16.*

Traveling, prose

The names that are scattered throughout the book will be as familiar as breathing itself to some, and to others will remain utterly unpronouncable points on a map. Middenmeer, Zwinjdrecht, Rotterdam, Dordrecht, Wiergerwerft – it is across this landscape that he leads the reader in this series of stories. A nomad of sorts, Kooij has done well to carry stories with him as he went.

From time to time, he gets sidetracked, rambling off on tangential details. On more than one occasion, he catches himself and writes, "but I was going to tell you about...." While there are times when the amount of peripheral detail can be a bit much, the trait endears more than it detracts from the storytelling. After all, who hasn't sat through a story and wondered, "Where is he going with this?" He always pulls the reader back, and the stories are all written with both direction and intention.

Stories From Years Gone By will find a welcome audience across generations. Those who walked similar paths themselves will be given a chance to reminisce and reflect on their own history, and readers from the generations that have now followed will be granted insight into the world that shaped their own. The book is written in clear and simple language that can be understood by young and old. Where there is an object, event or person that might not be known to a younger reader, or someone who did not grow up into the particularities of this culture, Kooij courteously offers an explanation.

"A close relative told me recently that I see and remember everything but always through rose-colored glasses. I take that as a compliment. I think that there is so much to be thankful for..."(177)

Why we tell stories

We roll our eyes too quickly, as children. In our youth, it is difficult to see beyond our own place in history, to understand the stories and sacrifice that shaped us. It is only when we have lived long enough to have ourselves sacrificed and suffered for the sake of love that we understand why we are told stories, and begin to tell them ourselves. Read this book, sit at the feet of a gifted storyteller, and be reminded of God's good provision.

Nick Schuurman (reviews@christiancourier.ca) serves as reviews editor for CC.

Features

Mary Abma, (jabma@cogeco.ca) lives in Bright's Grove with her husband and three children and is a member of Redeemer CRC in Sarnia, Ont. You can read more about her work on her website: ***web.me.com/maryabma.***

Mary Abma: art from dirt

Cathy Smith

When the 19th century Peasant Poet John Clare was asked, "Where do your poems come from?" he aptly replied, "I kick them out of the clods." Mary Abma's latest art pieces also derive from the dirt, the dirt in her own backyard. As the Agricultural Revolution fenced the commons, drained marshes and exiled peasants to textile mills, Clare mourned the loss of the traditional English landscape. Mary mourns a similar loss - Ontario's dwindling Carolinian forest, the extinction of native plants and the near-obliteration of a vibrant indigenous culture. Her most recent work, soon to be exhibited at both Redeemer University College (September 24-November 30, 2011) and Calvin College (January 6-February 18, 2012), ponders these losses. *In My Own Backyard* is a monumental effort in its conceptual framework, its comprehensive research and its profound respect for the natural world.

Wild Grape, *lumen print on photographic paper.*

Mary's art springs from a curious mind: "I visit themes that relate to universal experiences that are present in our own life narratives. I am especially interested in exploring the bridges that bring us into a connection with our past, those that identify our relationship with the natural world, and those that lead to an awareness of God."

The spark of this exhibition was Norway's "Doomsday" Seed Vault, underwritten by its government, the Global Crop Diversity Trust and the Nordic Genetic Resource Center. Intrigued by this so-called bio-diversity preservation project, Mary wondered about its ethical ramifications. "Food" seeds were being stored, a hedge against some future apocalypse. Was that diversity? Seeds safe in a sanctuary … but for whose profit? With what moral safeguards?

Researching the word origins of "sanctuary," Mary honed in on a Latin definition: "private cabinet of a prince." Pursuing the history of cabinets led her to the "apothecary cabinet" and to her own ancestor, Louis Hébert, an apothecary who settled in New France in the 1600s. Hébert had brought medicinal plants from France to his new home, a commonplace practice. Mary was struck by the possibility that the non-native plants in her own backyard could actually have been the result of her ancestor's unwitting eco-meddling.

Small Yellow Foxglove, *mixed media on hardboard panels with beeswax.*

Cultivation and conquest

Mary's reading of primary sources about early Canadian settlement led her to a fresh awareness of the "cultivation and conquest" imagery of colonial language, a vernacular that included the subjugation of the indigenous populations as well as the land. In some texts, native people were referred to as crops to be harvested or weeds to be exterminated. The settlers viewed their "cultivation" of the New World as beneficial, even heroic. Mary inscribed their ingenuous remarks, culled from letters and diaries, onto antique farm implements that were specifically used to cut land and crops. The irony is exquisite. Then, the blades were useful, the intentions, admirable. Now, we recognize that both the blades and the intentions had unforeseen and injurious consequences. The artistic meld of text and artefact forces the viewer to ponder the future. How will our present practices appear to generations yet to come?

It's easy to point fingers at corporations or to judge previous generations. Norman Wirzba's book, *The Paradise of God: Renewing Religion in an Ecological Age*, confronted Mary with her own obliviousness to the biological habitat just outside her back door. Was her ignorance leading to carelessness? Her lawn was overgrown with weeds and other plants she couldn't identify. She decided to create a herbarium of all the plants that grew unbidden in her yard. Enter scientific research, cataloguing, assistance from botany professors and the meticulous journaling of her process. With a sense of wonder, Mary discovered an incredible diversity in her lawn, over 75 plant species in all, the vast majority invasive and non-native.

Mary's research alerted her to the curious fact that early botanists often recorded their observations on paper covered with erasures. Perhaps they were merely dismissive of previous "old" knowledge, or, self-interested, they were seeking to convey discoveries as their own original work. Certainly much of their "new" knowledge was acquired through contact with native peoples, but, given the colonial mindset of cultural superiority, such "borrowing" was not credited. This covering up of old knowledge with new information inspired Mary to explore the idea of a "palimpsest," a recycled papyrus manuscript with the previous script still faintly discernible. Mary' series, *Herbarium of Lot 161, Plan 150*, grew from this concept. She created 120 panels of pressed plants from her backyard. First, she spray-painted the plants a metallic silver, purposely "altering" the plants, creating an artificial homogeneity to signify human intervention. Then the panels were layered with embedded fragments of historical text about each plant, including songs, recipes and medicinal attributes, and, lastly, painted with acrylics.

Mary noted that previous generations had far greater familiarity with native plant species and their properties than we do today. In 1750 all children could identify sow thistle because they fed it to their rabbits. Today, information about plants is readily available on Google, but divorced from daily experience. Do we take responsibility for knowledge if we assume it is readily accessible? Do we treasure knowledge, or is it disposable, a casualty of our drive-through culture?

Such questions led Mary to wonder about the plants that might have been flourishing in her yard today had it not been for settlement. She decided to create lumens, ghostly images of native plants made without technology through a completely natural photographic process. These ethereal silhouettes become evocative reminders of a native plant life that has been decimated by human ecological intervention.

God's intelligent design

And that, finally, brought Mary to a consideration of transcendence. Wirzba wrote, "We are, in short, bereft of a sense of the cosmos, the sense of an ordered whole that envelops and enables life." God's intelligent design for the interconnectedness of life, whether plant, animal or human, is often overlooked or ignored. Mary explored this idea artistically with an installation piece, a triptych. "I wanted this piece to embody the sacred, somehow, and this ultimately led me to reference the Christian sacrament of Eucharist because, first of all, it is very honest for me. The Eucharist is all about communion with God. It is a reminder of the sanctity of life and the importance of ritual. It puts us into a context in which we are thankful and humble. I also felt it was an appropriate reference because those of us who have inherited Christian beliefs and traditions need to take a close look at our history and move toward reconciliation where we have confused our own desires with Divine intention. This reconciliation includes how we treat the environment."

Mary collected seeds from her yard, storing them in an antique printer drawer, another allusion to the transference of knowledge. Similarly, she also collected rainwater, a full year's worth of precipitation. Three hundred and sixty-five communion glasses, carefully shrink-wrapped, contain a proportionate amount of water for each day's rainfall. The presentation emphasizes the life-giving potency of water, both physical and spiritual, but the packaging alludes to the current commodification of this critical resource. The third panel of the triptych features a soil monolith with exposed strata from her yard, as well as wafers created from the dirt. The installation welcomes the viewer to the Lord's Table – a Eucharist fashioned from the earth for a humanity created from dust.

Mary has been personally transformed by her work: "My whole notion of what constitutes a beautiful garden has changed. I also recognize my own responsibility when it comes to ecosystem degradation. I will not close the book on this project. Already we are in the process of redeeming our own little patch of creation: our yard. As I walk around it now, I can identify the vast majority of my weeds. I know what to nurture and what to pull out. We have designated two distinct areas of our yard as native plant gardens and hope to expand these over time."

In My Own Backyard is a mature show. The art is singularly elegant in its own right, but the exhibition as a whole is unified by an invisible coherence. It's the coherence of repentance and renewal offered in the chancels of our own backyards, where, as Martin Luther said, "Our Lord has written the promise of resurrection, not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime."

Cathy Smith (cathy@christiancourier.ca) is features editor with CC. *She lives in Wyoming, Ontario.*

Dordt College 2011 Senior Art Show

Anna Visser

For two months this past spring, Dordt College's art gallery was filled with art created by its own upperclassmen. In the first part of March, the gallery featured the work of art majors in the junior class, and the gallery finished out the year highlighting the work of the graduating senior art students.

The senior show was divided into three sections, each featuring five or six artists. According to professor and gallery coordinator David Versluis, this allowed each student to show a better representation of his or her own work and growth, as each show featured a grouping of 50 or 60 pieces.

A wide variety of media and subject matter was showcased, everything from photography to ceramics, graphic design posters to pencil drawings, sculptures to linocuts. Students put the shows together themselves under the guidance of Versluis. No specific theme was attached to the show as a whole, but some students chose an integrating idea to unite their own pieces. They then had to decide how best to display their art within the gallery among the work of the other students.

The shows were the culmination not only of the students' Dordt College art careers, but also of a class the students took in the previous semester called "Senior Seminar." Led by Professor Jake VanWyk, the students participated in discussions about what it means to be a Christian artist, how best to use their God-given artistic gifts and how to discover their place and calling in today's world. Each student was expected to put together an artist's statement, detailing his or her own Christian perspective on art. These statements were also on display in the senior show. In her statement, Canadian student Kaylene Kramer noted that art is now like an act of worship for her, not so much about creating beauty, but about finding and showcasing the beauty that already exists. Fellow-Canadian Rachel Minto agreed, saying that her work in pottery allows her to remember that "all aspects of life can be acts of worship. There is a place for art museums, but I think the most important aesthetic choice people can make is to bring beauty into tasks that they perform each day."

Although this show was technically part of a class, the artwork was not graded. All of the shows and art pieces were evaluated by Dordt College art faculty based on technique and mechanics, and students received these evaluations at the end of the show. According to Minto, this was a positive conclusion as she was able to share her work and her ideas and receive encouraging feedback.

Most of the art in the senior show was for sale and could be purchased directly from the students. This proved to be another beneficial aspect of the event. The students came into contact with the business side of their work and were able to observe how others truly enjoyed and appreciated their art.

Overall, students testified that the senior art show was a challenge – How does one compile four years' worth of work into one small show? – but it was also a worthwhile experience that brought their studies into a practical realm.

Anna Visser is a sophomore at Dordt College where she is studying music and English. She is from Ingersoll, Ontario.

Jo Alberda: listening to God and to her art

Anna Visser

In an artist's statement from one of her shows, Jo Alberda, former Dordt College professor, notes that life experiences naturally inform the work in the studio. Her faith also influences and is influenced by her art. Oftentimes we hear stories of those who made plans for their lives and later found out that their dreams were not necessarily what God had in mind for them. Jo, however, pursues her goals listening to God and to her art.

A Montana native, Jo loved to draw and paint as a child, but never imagined art as a career choice; she wanted to be a teacher. She studied art education and began her teaching career in a fifth grade classroom. After further education at Montana State University, Jo taught photography, ceramics and art history at Dordt College. She continued to study at the University of Minnesota, exploring a wide variety of subject matter and art forms. She notes that her knowledge of design theory and art history has had a positive influence on the formal elements of her artwork.

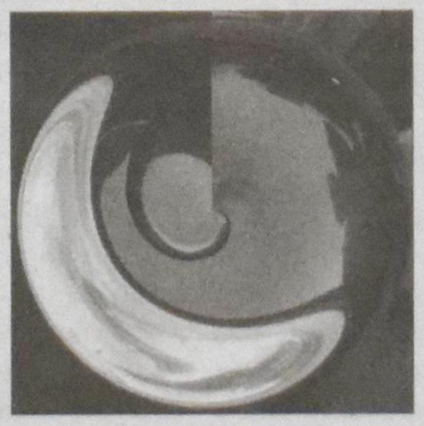
Since her retirement in 2001, Jo has been busy offering community workshops as well as working in her studio every day. She exhibits her work in galleries and museums. She is part of a photography group which meets regularly to prepare for exhibitions. She serves as Worship Environment Coordinator in her church and has been commissioned to create banners and paraments for churches, but also for offices and hospitals. Jo says of her career, "I find it hard to say that I intentionally made a decision to do 'art' - those doors were opened for me, and I happily walked through them."

While teaching art has led her to work with many different themes and media, Jo's favourites are in the area of textile arts. She loves weaving, stitching, quilting, dyeing and printing fabrics. Much of her art reflects patterns found in nature. She says of the mid-western United States, "I have learned to love the beautiful black soil and lush growth in this part of God's world." That love is evident in her art as she works with prairie images and the lifecycles she sees in her own gardens. Many of her pieces begin with a photograph. She may leave the photo as is, or alter it using a photo editing program. She will then transfer an idea from the image into fabric. A lot of her work is done by collage, using either commercial fabric or fabric which she herself prints, dyes, or discharges. Jo notes that some of her inspiration comes from the fabric and dye itself: "When printing or dyeing fabric, the unexpected nuances of the designs suggest subjects to consider. It's always good to listen to your media!" Jo has come to appreciate the way in which her fabrics allow her to recognize rhythm, form, and colour in nature, and the way her camera has heightened her sense for value, light and contrast.

Revelling in God's faithfulness

Jo's faith is another important theme in her art. While she admits that being a Christian artist is not necessarily any different from being a Christian in any other field of work, she believes that, because she works from a Christian worldview and creates art about the things which are most important to her, her faith is expressed through her subject matter. Through her art and her exploration of the world around her, she celebrates God's love for creation. She says, "God is revealed through his Word and also through his Creation. I revel in God's faithfulness as seen in nature, the incredible beauty and intricate design from the vast cosmos to the tiniest atom, and in the unfailing cycles of life and time. Simple ideas taken from nature often become metaphors for life as experienced by God's people." One common theme in her work is a motif she calls "Blue Marbles." These images are relatively abstract and, while not always blue, are always round, and reflect the idea that God holds all things in the palm of his hand. Jo acknowledges that her art only reveals a very small part of God's story -- "but that's why God made many artists."

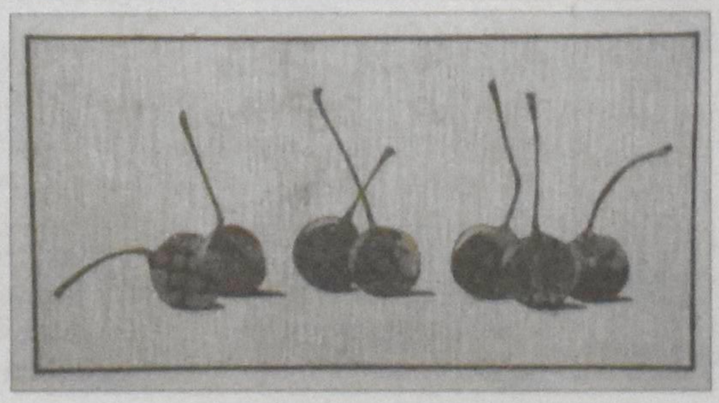
Jo observes that the beginning process of her artwork gives her energy, and discovering new artistic ideas brings her joy. She is excited by new and contrasting textures, by vibrant colours, by the rhythm of weaving and the character of loose threads. She loves the "visual music" she creates through the elements of her craft and by the inspiration of her faith and the surrounding landscape.



Far left: Prairie Vine*: fabric collage with hand-dyed fabrics.*

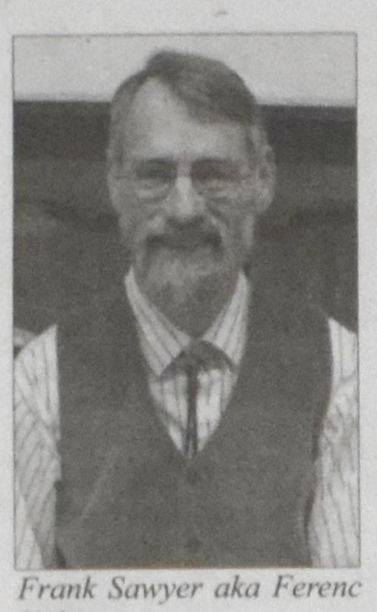
Kassy's Car*: a digitally manipulated reflection.*

Below: Black Apples*: batik.*



Passionate about both, Jo has invested a lifetime into her teaching and her art. She has let her life happen as it was meant to, allowing God and her media to speak to her: "It all involves some joy and some grind, sometimes it is an act of worship, sometimes just a job, but overall, very satisfying."

Features



Frank Sawyer aka Ferenc Költemeny.

Painter and poet: *an interview with Frank Sawyer*

Ferenc Költemeny*

What does the relationship between poetry and painting mean for you?

Well, I dabble in both, but, keep in mind, that these are only hobbies.

Why do you paint nature? Isn't it enough just to look at nature? When you paint it, aren't you only creating a virtual reality?

Yes, it is a kind of virtual reality. Yet, the painting – as a painting – is real. I mean, it has its own reality.

You mean, made of canvas and paint?

That is the material basis, but that is not the painting. The painting represents something in lines, shapes, colours, perspective, and it is a message of certain feelings, expressions, ideas and the like.

Would you say that art interprets something?

Certainly. It simplifies the view and emphasizes certain aspects, and this can give us new insight. Some folks say that "art speaks for itself." That probably means that it has its own reality to present, by representing what is in the mind's eye of the artist.

So, when you paint a scene of nature, you want to express something?

It could be awe, a subtle mood, a little mystique, maybe fear of a storm, a shiver in winter. There are plenty of ways a painting of nature can portray a mood. It is never an absolute statement, of course, just a fleeting view which could change by merely moving one's eyes a few degrees across reality. Even if one fixes one's gaze on a view within nature, a passing cloud and the movement of the sun can change the view in tone and in contrast of light and shadow quicker than a painter can capture and try to pin down in paint!

How does your painting technique and your portrayal of nature work together?

The technique depends on the desired result. There is always some way of applying the paint; some use of design in shape and colour; some choice of theme, perspective and emphasis. Part of the technique depends upon whether a painting is done with oils, watercolours or acrylics. It also differs between a large canvas or mural, and a small or even miniature one. Also, the artist can work with a dry brush, or a wet floppy mop for another effect, or with a palette knife. A "mop" is a soft round brush used in watercolour. A variation of this brush is called a "hake," originally from Japan. That kind of brush lends itself to a different technique than does a thin pointed one for careful lines and details. A painting can be done by filling in precise sketches, or it can be done directly, free-hand, and then it has a more impressionist result.

A painting seems less multi-dimensional than a poem. A poem has sound, precise thoughts, paints a view, plays with words, creates a mood...

A painting does that, too. It creates a mood, displays the result of thought, gives a viewpoint – it doesn't have sound – but it has a perspective, shapes and colours. So it is just as multi-dimensional as a poem. We are always walking back and forth between a wholistic view (I like it spelled with a "w" for wholeness) and a choice-of-focus view.

Lonesome Tree

So, I could focus on one part or technical aspect of the painting?

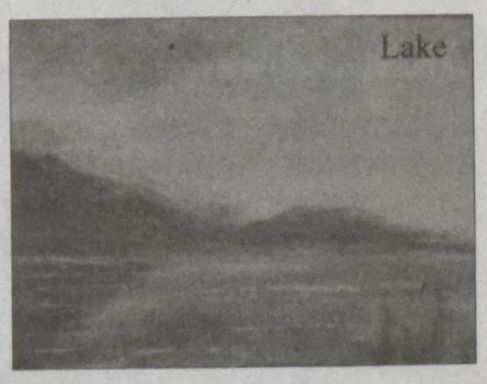
You could, in order to analyze what makes it tick aesthetically, but then you need to put the separate foci together into the pattern the painting gives. And the painting is only one view, one approach to the reality of the scene - in this case, a lake.

Your poems sometimes have a "theological focus." They speak about biblical themes and use terms like "grace" and point toward faith. Is there any of this in your paintings?

A "theological" or faith aspect can't be avoided, even if only implicitly.

I don't find much of that in the Lake painting.

It's not immediately seen. Maybe it's submerged under the water.



You are joking.

I was thinking of the way half-hidden meanings bob to the surface of our experience. There is an oblique understanding of theological hints. The sky points to heaven as the realm of God. Or, the opening up of the sky and horizon point to the future, even a divine future of what God is doing in the world. "Heaven and earth" is a biblical phrase – and this can be included in a view of nature. People who live in the city with traffic, machines, and the media miss the quiet pristine sounds of nature. If you enter the Lake painting and sit down on a log, you would probably hear some birdcalls, perhaps a frog or two, a trout jump – like the poem *Lake Kathlyn* says (printed in *CC*'s May 23rd, 2011 issue). And if, as I speculate, the wind is setting up, then you could see whitecaps, hear the waves, and catch the breeze. The sky might shift dramatically several times. What I am saying is that the painting could be making a point about the divine backdrop to reality and how our finite existence relates to the infinite.

Is this in the painting or in the mind's eye of the viewer?

It should be in the correlation between the two.

So the painting seems to help the viewer re-live the elements, like wind and sun?

Interesting that you use the word "elements." That is an old phrase for the forces of nature, going all the way back to the early Greeks who spoke about the elements of the cosmos as fire, air, water and earth. Forces to be reckoned with, semi-divine, perhaps. It's still that way today. When you ask for the deeper meaning, or theology, in all of this, we can say that people are always interpreting these "forces." I think Paul touches on that in Colossians 2:8 where he speaks of philosophy and human interpretations of the elements or basic principles that make our world function. Everything is related to everything. So the way we see things, whether nature or art or philosophy, all ties together.

So you think that there is a depth of thought both by the artist and the viewer which creates this unifying of experiences?

Yes. So, in other words, the distinctively modern idea that the world of nature is merely an object for our science, technology and practical living – this is shown to be a reduction of nature. Nature has a mind of its own – there are forces that are obedient to superhuman laws and, finally, to God. This is the spirit of the Psalms, for example. So the re-living of a part of nature in a painting can be a way of entering into the "forceful" reality of the world and the cosmos. This gives us a different perspective than the "technical" and "practical" one I just mentioned. It is once again a question of a more wholistic experience. But the smaller or larger steps made in this direction come out of our own personal histories. It's a dialogue – in this case between painting (artist) and viewer – and includes our skill in analyzing a painting. Different people have variations of experience, but it is not a free-for-all. In other words, art (or a poem) speaks for itself.

It has its own "voice," its own message?

I think it does – because it has its own reality in relation to the rest of reality.

Frank Sawyer
A Way of Seeing

Frank's book, *A Way of Seeing*, may be ordered from Frank Sawyer for 12 dollars plus postage. Kindly order or inquire by emailing fsawyer777@gmail.com

*Ferenc Költemeny is Frank 's Hungarian alter-ego.
View more of Frank Sawyer's work at
http://srta.tirek.hu/lap/sawyerf

Frank Sawyer (fsawyer777@gmail.com) was born in BC and studied at Calvin College and in the Netherlands where he became a pastor. Since 1982 he has served with Christian Reformed World Missions, first in Latin America and then in Hungary, where he teaches philosophy and ethics at Sarospatak Seminary.

Columns

Intangible Things

Heidi Vander Slikke

You meet the nicest people

Early one afternoon I sat paying bills. The phone rang and my day suddenly got more interesting. Jack and Marian Fernhout, a couple of *Christian Courier* readers from Edmonton, Alberta, were having lunch in Listowel, only a 20 minute drive from here. Over the years I had occasionally exchanged e-mails with them. We discovered a mutual love for motorcycling. I suggested they should stop in if they were ever in the neighbourhood. To my delight, they accepted my invitation.

I'm always happy to receive e-mails, letters or phone calls from readers. Often they arrive at just the right time – when I have fully convinced myself that my writing is trivial and "nobody wants to read it." (Interestingly, this usually occurs around the time I have a column due.) Beyond the much appreciated encouragement to keep going is the satisfying feeling that I have actually connected with a reader.

In the film *Shadowlands,* C.S. Lewis says, "We read to know that we are not alone." I believe the same is true of writing. We write in the hope that our experiences, feelings and thoughts are common enough to resonate within those who read our work. There is no greater compliment to a writer than someone saying, "I can relate."

The Yamaha Venture rumbled into the yard, towing a trailer with camping gear behind. These folks are dedicated bikers – traveling from their home in Edmonton all the way to New York City, to visit their son and daughter-in-law.

We sat at the kitchen table for an hour or so – Marian, me and our pair of Jacks – drinking coffee and trading biker stories. We talked about our families, work, faith life and travel plans. Although we had just met, it all felt pleasantly familiar.

Jack has been riding great distances for years, but because of problems with her knee, Marian hadn't always joined him for the longer trips. Now he had a different motorcycle and she could sit comfortably. She appreciated the beauty of the open road from the backseat. She shared with me how God has used the whole motorbike experience to stretch her horizons, relieving her of the felt need to keep everything "under control," and the desire to live a perfectly predictable (safe) life. God is teaching her to trust him for whatever comes next. I know the feeling.

With no inclination to drive herself, Marian remains the navigator. She loves to read maps and has mastered hanging onto printed MapQuest directions at high speeds. She directs Jack's turns while he negotiates through traffic. I can learn from their attitude. If it rains, they get wet. If they get lost, they work at finding their way out, but never miss the scenery along the way. For them, life on the road is a grand adventure.

The rain started as we said goodbye. I wiped the Yamaha's seats with a *doekje* while Jack and Marian pulled on their matching helmets. As they drove away I longed to get on my Triumph and join them (although I'd probably turn back from NYC). "Don't worry," said my Jack. "Our turn will come soon."

*****

I called the Fernhouts yesterday to ask permission to write about them. They had just returned home from their tour.

"How was the weather?" I asked.

"Great," said Jack. "We only had one lengthy stretch of pouring rain – about 120 kilometres from North Battleford to Lloydminster. So that was pretty good." Only a die-hard biker could enjoy half a day of getting drenched.

I asked Marian how things went in New York City. She told me they only made one wrong turn, about five blocks from their son's house. That landed them in South Brooklyn, in 90 degree heat. It took two hours to get back where they belonged. "But it was good," she said. I could picture the smile on her face.

The best part of the trip? That was easy for Marian. "The people," she said, "All the nice people we met along the way."

This week we're getting ready to take off on our own ride, with plans to circle Lake Superior. I look at the maps and find the distance somewhat intimidating. I look at all the work that needs to be done before we leave and wonder if it's worth it. But when I think of Marian's words – trusting God for whatever comes next – I can't wait to go. And just think of all the nice people we may meet along the way.

Jack and Marian Fernhout.

Heidi Vander Slikke (hm-vanderslikke@hotmail.com) lives in Harriston, Ontario.

Artful Eye

Heather Wright is a reporter and photographer living in Petrolia, Ont. She is a member of Dresden CRC.

Iconoclast

My grandfather Ezra painted a gigantic face
on the side of the shed when he cleaned his brushes,
stroking the weathered boards with leftover barn red,
till a man with a worldly mustache and pompadour

stared out across his half-section of Alberta wheat.
Ezra himself kept the Ordnung, shaved his mustache
and trimmed his beard, though he played baseball
on Saturdays. Nothing wrong with a little fun.

But a newcomer moved in down the road,
complained that his neighbor had painted a pinko
for everyone to see. Ezra shrugged, whitewashed the shed,
returned to the plow with a book in his hand.

No matter if the furrows are crooked, he said,
the seed will sprout just the same.
And Sundays after church he drew eagles
in the margins of his Bible.

Ann Hostetler

Reprinted with permission from Empty Room with Light (DreamSeeker Books 2002).

Ann Hostetler is an English professor at Goshen College in Indiana and is the author of a volume of poetry, Empty Room with Light *(DreamSeeker Books, 2002). Her work has won numerous awards and has appeared in a wide variety of publications. Check out her website at* ***www2.goshen.edu/~anneh/***

Columns

My Window Seat

Mendelt Hoekstra

Blind date: unique church looking for perfect pastor

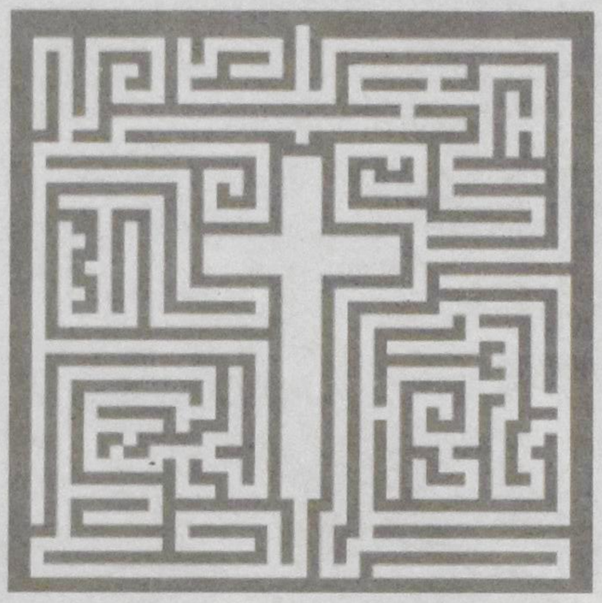
The church that our family attends, Jubilee Fellowship CRC in St. Catharines, Ontario, is looking for a lead pastor. I am on the Pastor Search Committee. It is a wonderful, strange and holy experience.

Our committee is comprised of nine wonderful people to (we hope) represent the congregation and its various demographics. This way, we can all come to the meeting with some knowledge of what like-minded people want as we keep in mind and discern what God wants for our church.

As a church, we have been updating our church profile to show the uniqueness, sameness, strengths and needs of our church. It can be an uncomfortable experience, somewhat similar to dating. In high school, I never called up a girl and told her my flaws – that I'm not very organized or might forget her birthday – *before* asking for a date. We need to navigate that fine line between "selling our church," representing ourselves accurately and having a good grasp of where we, as a church, should be heading.

One of my roles on the committee is to make the initial phone call to see if the potential candidate is still available for a call, *after* we have already discussed them and read their profile together.

"Hi, my name is Mendelt, a member of the Pastor Search Committee at Jubilee, and we've been talking behind your back . . . . We are wondering if you are still available for a call because we are looking for a lead pastor who can do, well, everything."



Pleased to meet you

As a committee we've poured over the resumes and profiles of pastors who have been recommended to us by others, by our denominational office or by the pastors themselves. It's a bit like sending in a resume before the blind date. Some we've looked at and basically discarded because we didn't feel like it would be a good fit for either our church or the pastor. That is a scary thing to do. It sometimes feels like a lot of pressure. We don't work in a cloak of secrecy, yet we need to value discretion and use it appropriately.

Sometimes we end up saying that this person seems too young, too bold, too old . . . and I can't help but wonder – are we even allowed talking like that about God's chosen shepherds?

We pray for the Spirit's guidance like crazy. We continually ask that the Spirit guides us and the people we speak to (or about) and the whole process. As a committee, we understand that although we are players in this search, prayer and scripture will mold our process. We also understand that our role is to recommend a candidate to our church leadership and not to make the decision ourselves. Occasionally I wonder if it would be easier to have the outgoing pastor fill his or her position. They would, after all, intimately know the needs, strengths and direction of the church.

We've spoken to a few people and even invited them to our church for a "date." We've shared wine, broke bread and sat down for three-hour interviews. We've told them all the great things about our region, the beauty of the land and the great places to visit. Then we wonder afterwards, did the pastor like us; did we speak well and use coherent sentences; were we interesting enough? Just like dating.

The experience, and only God knows how long it will be, has been great for me. I sit on the committee with some people I didn't previously know well, and some people who disagree with me (I love that). But most of all, the experience of meeting regularly and purposefully talking about the direction of our church brings me closer to God. It continually brings the kingdom and purpose of God to the forefront of my mind .

Mendelt Hoekstra (mendelt.hoekstra@gmail.com) is the director of the Music Therapy Program at Bethesda, an organization that supports adults with developmental possibilities. He lives near St. Catharines, Ont. with his wife and five children.

Toddlers to Teens

Denise Dykstra

Being a light of the online world

The other day I got sucked into an argument on Facebook. I'm not proud of this; in fact, I'm downright embarrassed. Not only did I react in an insensitive way – I did it for the entire world to see. It's very humbling.

When I finally came to my senses and ended the argument, I asked my oldest son if he'd seen the comments I had written. "Ya, I did," he said, "and I thought you were acting out of character." He was right.

I've been preaching to our kids for years now about being careful with what they say on Facebook. The internet is a public place, I've often reminded them. But when you're sitting in your living room directing comments to one person, it's difficult to remember that others can read what you're writing too. I'm an adult and I still managed to forget.

Much has been written about kids and the internet. I'd like to focus on teaching children to be careful about what they say when it comes to social media.

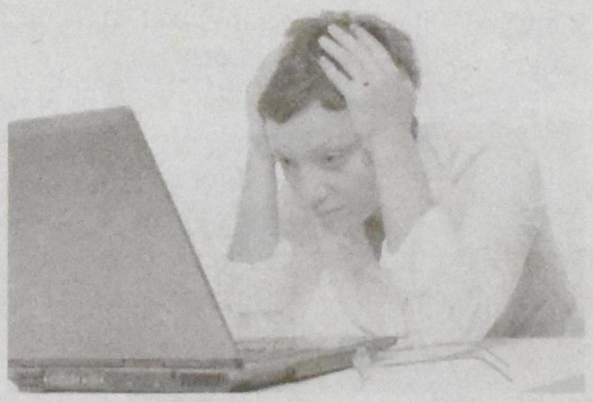
When parents allow their kids access to a social network, it's common for them to set rules regarding personal safety. Don't be friends with anyone you don't know; don't give out your address, phone number or school name. Setting these rules is a great idea, but I believe we should also be teaching our children how to speak when they're online.

From the time our kids are able to talk, we coach them on good manners. We remind them to say please and thank you, ask them not to interrupt, and praise them when they say excuse me. As the internet becomes an indispensable tool for everyday life, we also need to teach our kids to apply manners to the online world. We need to teach them good cyber-citizenship.

Real life rules still apply

Being a good cybercitizen means being respectful when we're interacting with people over the internet. It means remaining honest and polite in all conversations. It means guarding the privacy of others and not stooping to name calling. It means speaking the way we would if the people we're interacting with were standing right in front of us.

Being a good cybercitizen also means being responsible in the virtual world. It means reporting illegal activity, staying away from plagiarism, and steering clear of gossiping or bullying. It means not saying anything that could come back to haunt us. Every once in a while a story pops up of someone losing their job because of a Facebook status update. Just recently, in fact, a couple of people were on the news for being fired for making comments that condoned the riot that followed game seven of the Stanley Cup playoffs in Vancouver. How awful to lose your livelihood because you weren't being responsible on the web!



Being a good cybercitizen also means being discreet. It means not splashing our innermost thoughts and feelings on the internet for everyone to see. What we say on a social network is permanent. It's a data trail that will follow us for the rest of our lives. Being a good cybercitizen means creating a legacy we'll be proud to leave for our children and grandchildren.

Basically, being a good cybercitizen means being Christ-like online as well as offline. It means being a light in the digital world as well as in the physical world.

Denise Dykstra (dykstras@telus.net) lives in Edmonton, Alberta. She's a writer and mother of five.

Christian internet code of ethics:

I guard my online relationships.

I recognize that attachments develop as easily on the internet as anywhere else, and sometimes more easily because of the anonymity involved in initial exchanges. I particularly guard against relationships that encroach upon the level of trust and faithfulness that is to exist only within a husband/wife relationship.

I am careful to visit websites that do not compromise my life in Christ.

I am aware that there are sites on the internet that Christians must avoid, including those that contain pornography. I do not visit such sites, even out of curiosity.

I take care that my written communications reflect Christ in my life.

Even on issues about which I feel passionate, I avoid saying things that I feel might be displeasing to the Lord. I represent myself and my intentions in a truthful and upright manner in all my exchanges.

I realize that the internet can consume time that should be invested elsewhere: family, church, work responsibilities, and other activities that make for a well-rounded life. I especially guard against spending time on the internet that should be spent with the Lord.

*Special thanks to **Naznet.ca** for sharing this.*

Columns

The Public Square

Harry Antonides

Who is Frances Fox Piven?

In all likelihood, you have never heard of Frances Fox Piven. But she and her late husband Richard A. Cloward have been very successful in their long academic career to promote the hard left notion of class struggle as a tool for the transformation of American society.

Piven was born in Calgary, Alberta, in 1932. Her Russian immigrant parents moved to the U.S. when she was one year old, where she obtained American citizenship in 1953. In 1962 she graduated in social science from the University of Chicago. She has taught at the University of Columbia and various other universities. In 1982 she became a professor of political science and sociology at the City University of New York, where she still serves as Distinguished Professor.

Piven and Cloward developed what became known as the "Cloward-Piven Strategy," which amounts to mobilizing the poor for militant, direct action aimed at overturning the existing political structure in America.

They had the advantage of being able to influence multiple generations of students. The other advantage they enjoyed was the revolution of the 1960s that tried very hard (and mostly succeeded) in overthrowing all traditional notions of right and wrong.

The secret of their success was that they did not advocate the class struggle directly, but they packaged their ideology in a concern for the plight of the poor, the Blacks and other powerless minorities.

A call to revolution

Instead of viewing America as a land of opportunity and freedom, they see it as a land of systemic injustice where power is concentrated in the rich and the successful. The end they have in mind is the total transformation of America by wresting the power away from the traditional elite by militant action, including strikes, riots, looting things such as granaries, or burning machines (See Piven and Cloward's *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How they Fail,* p. 20).

In May 1966 they published a famous article in *The Nation*, "The Weight of the Poor: A Strategy to End Poverty." The scenario they lay out in this article is not really about ending poverty, nor is it to encourage the poor to get an education and/or a job if at all possible. Instead, their advice is to get the maximum number of people on the welfare rolls so that the system becomes overloaded and is destroyed from within. This has happened in various cities, especially in New York, which was nearly bankrupted.

Frances Fox Piven

Piven and Cloward launched a "Welfare Rights Movement" headed by George Wiley, which managed to put into effect many of their ideas. David Horowitz and Richard Poe write that Wiley "was able to inflict more damage on America's body politic than any of the better-known icons of radical politics" (*The Shadow Party*, p.108).

The two radical professors applied the same strategy of militant and disruptive action when they began the Voting Rights Movement. Again, they were not really interested in improving people's opportunities to take part in elections. The result, including the Motor Voter legislation passed in 1993 and followed by left-wing militant action, was large-scale, unchecked electoral corruption. Indiana state officials found that in the 2000 election, 20 per cent of the registered voters were fraudulent.

Piven is a committed revolutionary who has a prominent place in the American and international socialist movements. She was a sponsor of *New Politics*, an independent socialist forum.

Bitter ironies

In her talk at the 1983 Socialist Scholars Conference, where the 100-year anniversary of Karl Marx's death was commemorated, she said that Marx's ideas had enabled "common people" to become "historical actors." She urged her listeners to "stand within the intellectual and political tradition Marx bequeathed," treating it not as a "dead inheritance" but rather as a "living tradition – the creation of active people" (**DiscovertheNetworks.org**).

Historian Will Durant has said that a great civilization cannot be destroyed from the outside until it falls first from the inside. Frances Piven's career is a prime example of one who abets in the fall of America from within. There is another bitter irony in her story.

She is a person whose family must have escaped from Communist Russia where the application of Marx's ideas led to the death of tens of millions of people and the misery and serfdom of hundreds of millions more across the world.

Now distinguished Professor Piven has benefited for a lifetime from the freedom and the prestige attached to a position of trust and privilege in one of the great institutions of America. Yet she uses this position to denigrate America and to praise an ideology that is responsible for one of the most gruesome and largest scale crimes ever committed against humanity and humanity's Creator.

Harry Antonides (hantonides@sympatico.ca) retired as director of the former Work Research Foundation. He lives in Willowdale, Ontario.

Country Living

Meindert Vander Galien

Rare "Sail Reaper" highlight of B.C. agricultural museum

If you think you've seen it all when it comes to antique farm machinery and pioneer collection items, you haven't been to the B.C. Farm Machinery and Agricultural Museum in the Fraser Valley. It is one of the largest pioneer museums in Canada.

On a recent visit to British Columbia, my brother-in-law, Donald Waite, took me to see three museums. We are both history buffs, acting like kids in a candy store at museums.

Donald was a top-notch aerial photographer who used to lean out of small aircraft to snap his photos. He has also written numerous books and loves going to museums to do research.

The day he took me to the Farm Museum in Fort Langley, the museum was closed to the public. Perfect! We were given a grand tour of the place.

When we arrived at the lower level, we met a dozen retired mechanics, machinists and millwrights who volunteer every Monday to restore old vehicles and machinery. The man in charge of the restoration work was a big fellow with a Dutch name and an accent. I greeted him in Dutch and asked what year he immigrated. He was impressed that I had no accent and was still able to speak fairly good Dutch. As it turns out, Hans has been in B.C. since 1952. He didn't like farm work in his youth, being more mechanically inclined, and so worked all his life as a diesel mechanic. He and his wife visit relatives in Holland every few years.

Hans gave us a complete tour of the building (a former factory). Some artifacts are always locked away. At one point, he said, "Meindert, get your camera out again because I'm going to show you something you've never seen before."

Two-headed calf

In front of me at eye level was a (stuffed) two-headed Hereford calf – a red body with two white faces. The calf was born on a farm in Brooks, Alberta in 1980 and lived three weeks. It was a big-sized calf!

Other highlights included B.C.'s first crop dusting 1941 vintage Tiger Moth airplane, a 1919 Model T milk truck used now in parades and a Coleman High Cut Plow, which I had never seen before. They were built to cut a deep furrow – probably in black mucky ground. There were many makes and models of antique tractors. An Avery 1920 model C-6, 6-12 hp tractor was the first one to have power steering. It has a shaft gear in front of the hood going to the front wheels.

My biggest surprise was seeing a Sail Reaper – an early grain binder from the mid-1800s – in mint condition. Revolving wooden rakes, like paddle wheels, swept cut grain onto a platform from which a man walking alongside raked it off into piles. The machine could harvest more grain than five men using the earlier cradles. I forgot to measure the width of the cut – four or five feet, maybe.

Grain-harvesting technology has made spectacular progress, especially when you consider that a few farmers were still cutting grain by hand and flailing it in the barn as late as the1860s, a method that produced fewer than eight bushels of grain per day.

A major breakthrough came in 1834 in the United States when Cyrus McCormick, a Virginia farmer and inventor, patented a device to cut and collect grain – the McCormick Reaper. A clergyman named Obed Hussey in Ohio had actually brought out his own machine a year earlier, but McCormick's model proved more popular after 1840. It was claimed that McCormick's machine could reap 10-15 acres per day.

A man walked behind the early reapers holding the reins of the horses, but later reapers allowed the driver to sit on the machine, saving his weary feet and allowing more working time.

In 1880, McCormick invented the binder which used a magical knotting device to bind the sheaves of grain with binder twine. The popular binder was used until the combine harvester was invented. They first came on the scene around 1920. Then came the self-propelled combines in the 1940s. But binders and the threshing mills were still used on small farms until the late 1960s.

The museum tour was like a walk through the past. If you get the chance, this agricultural museum is well worth your time.

Meindert van der Galien is a Renfrew-area (Ottawa Valley) farmer. His neighbour runs a combine with a 35-ft (cut) header.

Classifieds

Anniversaries

Boilen, The Netherlands - July 12 - St. Thomas, Ontario

Harry and Trienke Dykstra
(nee **Nusselder**)

If Your Presence
does not go with us,
do not send us up from here.
Exodus 33:15a

With thankfulness to God our Father, for his care and blessing, we announce the **60th Wedding Anniversary** of our parents, grandparents & great-grandparents.

With love,
Jane Dykstra & Doug Pattison & family, *Tasmania, Australia*
Ray & Anita Dykstra & family, *Gorrie, Ontario*
Randy & Christa Dykstra & family, *Belmont, Ontario*

The **Open House** for Harry and Trienke's 60th anniversary **has been cancelled**.

Correspondence may be addressed to:
16 Thorman Terrace, St. Thomas ON N5P 4H9

With joy and thankfulness to our Lord,
We celebrated the **60th Wedding Anniversary** of

Jacob and Maria Kuntz

on June 29, 2011.
They were married in Haarlemmermeer on June 29, 1951 and Jacob entered the ministry in the same year. Together they served congregations in Tzum and Schoonebeek in the Netherlands, and Orillia, Owen Sound, New Westminster, St. Catharines, Kitchener, and the Holland Christian Homes in Canada.

Their faithful servanthood,
their grace during times of deep sorrow
and their persistent love
continue to be a profound inspiration to us.
We invite you to join us in congratulating them.

With much love from their children and grandchildren
Evelyn and Syd Hielema
Joya, Justin and Adrian

Home address:
King Tower 1501 - 35 Kingknoll Drive
Brampton ON L6Y 5G5

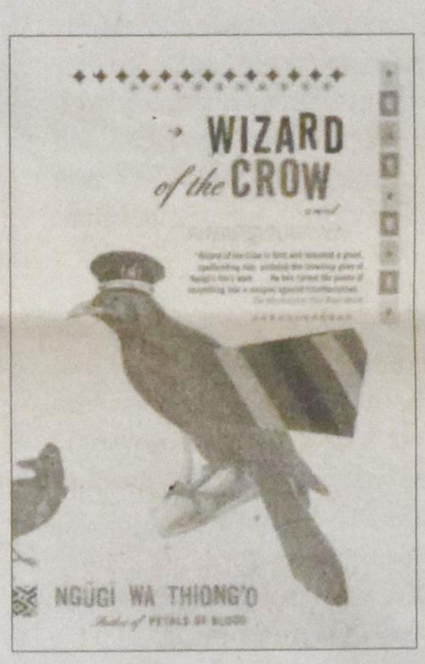
jacobkuntz@rogers.com

Wizard of the Crow

Adrian Helleman

The pen is mightier than the sword. I just finished reading a powerful novel, *Wizard of the Crow*, by Ngugi wa Thiong'o (b. 1938), an exiled Kenyan novelist, playwright, poet and literary critic. Ngugi has taught at many universities, but now lives in Irvine, California and teaches English and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Irvine, as well as directing the university's International Center for Writing and Translation.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o



Ngugi wrote this novel in Gikuyu, and translated it himself into English. He was baptized James Ngugi, but later in life he renounced English, Christianity and his name as vestiges of colonialism. Today he writes in Gikuyu in order to reject the colonial ties that are expressed in European languages. Instead, he wants to build an authentic African literature using native languages.

Due to his writings about the dictatorial government in Kenya Ngugi was first imprisoned and later exiled. *Wizard of the Crow* (2006) was his first novel after almost 22 years in exile.

Ngugi sets this novel in the "Free Republic of Aburiria," and populates it with a host of fantastic characters, of whom the weirdest, no doubt, is the Ruler, who confuses his own persona with that of his country. He is your typical self-obsessed African tyrant, who is not afraid to use brute force to achieve his goals.

The Ruler is surrounded by advisors, who constantly vie with each other for his ear and his favor and are obsessed with enriching themselves from the public coffers. They too are typical of Africa, although they not exclusive to that continent.

The eponymous Wizard, who inadvertently adopts that role, is the hero of the story. He is a spiritual figure who moves the drama forward, without fully understanding the consequences of his actions. His girlfriend, Nyawira, is also gifted spiritually, yet she is the most politically and socially conscious character. Perhaps she is Ngugi's *alter ego*, or to use a more contemporary term, his avatar.

There are too many other characters in this novel to list much less describe now. This is not a book review, after all.

The aim of Ngugi is, in his own words, "to sum up Africa of the twentieth century in the context of two thousand years of world history." With corrosive humor, he attacks African politicians, foreign missionaries, American diplomats and functionaries, and sundry other powerful people who victimize ordinary Africans.

This novel is a parody, in which the author with his pen sketches these characters, many of whom in the end destroy themselves, vividly and mercilessly. At 766 pages it is long, yet it is a very powerful and effective tool. Tyrants and their sycophants,whether in Africa or elsewhere, ought to quake in their boots. Their end is coming. Even the Emperor, who replaces the Ruler at the end of the novel, must realize his mortality.

The Wizard represents a reality that is unfamiliar to most people from the West. In Africa, and indeed in much of the world, people believe that spirits are real. He uses his knowledge of herbs to heal people, but he also utilizes their fear of spirits to influence events.

Ngugi condemns much in this novel, everything from greed to Western paternalism. But he does not pick any one cause as the chief source of the continent's misery. There is no happy ending to this novel, yet it is suffused with hope.

The strongest characters are women. In a culture that condones wife-beating, they turn the tables. Nyawira, especially, typifies the African woman in her search for justice. She is revealed in the end as the head of the opposition movement in Aburiria.

Women will save Africa. Not that they cannot be as ambitious and greedy as men, but they are closer to the earth and do the bulk of the work. As the Chinese say, "Women support more than half the sky."

These observations are my personal take on this magisterial novel. Even if you never been to Africa, you will enjoy it immensely. I have spent many years there, and revel in the opportunity to introduce African literature.

It is too bad that Ngugi has not yet won the Nobel Prize for Literature, in spite of being nominated numerous times. Please do yourself a favor and borrow it from your local library.

The pen is indeed mightier than the sword.

Adrian Helleman maintains a blog called "What in the World? A personal take on what is happening in the world today." For most of the year, he lives in Toronto but teaches philosophy and theology several months at a time in countries throughout Africa.

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Beacon Christian High shuts down

Bert Witvoet

ST. CATHARINES, ON. – The news that Beacon Christian High School ceased operation at the end of this school year hit hard for those who saw it as an essential institution in a city with more than 132,000 inhabitants. How is it possible that there was not enough support in a city that size to keep the only Christian high school afloat? Beacon was known as a school that offered quality education; its staff was highly dedicated to the aims of integrated Christian education and unselfishly served the interest of their students. What led to this closure?

From l. to r.: Samantha Bowman, Rebekah VandenBurg, Caleb DeBoer and Megan Schilstra have just written one of their final exams at Beacon. All express regret that they can't finish their high school education at Beacon "at a time when they face most of their challenges as teenagers." They did see a silver lining in that the high school will not jeopardize the continued existence of Beacon elementary by running a deficit.

To understand the reasons, you have to know the environment in which Beacon had to compete for students. Since there are six Christian Reformed churches in the immediate area, churches that are known to be the driving force behind Christian education, you would think this provides enough students to feed future enrolments, even if other evangelicals were slow to catch on. But this has proven not to be the case.

First of all, the CRC community in town experienced a schism in the 1990s when a sizable group of believers left the denomination and formed what is now known as the United [Orthodox] Reformed Churches. These folks started their own school in neighbouring Jordan at both the elementary and secondary level, drawing support from other conservative Reformed communities. This left Beacon with a somewhat depleted student body. But the damage was not fatal.

Another bigger challenge appeared on the horizon when Eden Christian College, a Mennonite Christian high school, moved into town. It joined the public school board, dropped the term "Christian" from its name, and agreed to study religion and hold chapel outside of normal school hours. Eden has kept some aspects of a Christian school alive, but these features are dwindling. Now with almost 1,000 students, the school is not free to limit the hiring of teachers to those who profess Christ, including the appointment of a principal.

Eden's attraction was its free tuition and good quality of education. Parents who normally would have sent their children to Beacon now send them to Eden, often because their children express a desire to join a bigger and different school.

Chapel with guest Pastor Craig Danielson.

This trend grew stronger as the cost of Christian education rose significantly.

An additional weak point for some students was that Beacon Christian High had only one feeder school, namely Beacon Christian Elementary School. This meant that you could conceivably move through 12 years of Christian education without much variation among classmates.

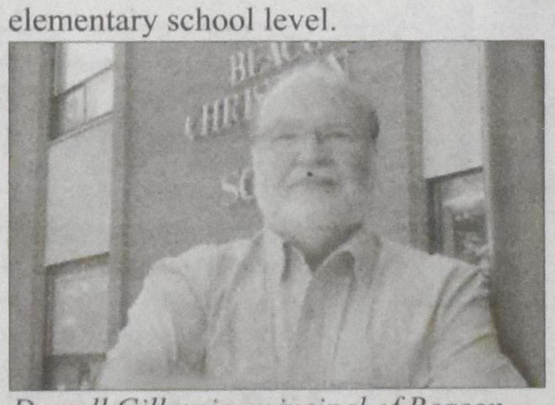
Handful of challenges

Finally, based on family declarations, Beacon's enrolment projection for 2011-2012 dipped to 58 students, the lowest in its history. The schools started the 2010-2011 year with 85 young people. Little wonder that the Board was forced to call several membership meetings to address the problem.

Worse, the school was deeply in debt after significant renovations at both the elementary and secondary levels. In fact, this debt, which stands at $4.5 million, was the catalyst that moved the Board to declare a crisis. Quick efforts to raise funds so that the school could continue for a number of years were not sufficient to change both the reality of financial trouble and the loss of confidence by parents to enroll their children at Beacon. The membership finally made the decision in June to close down the high school, leaving the current staff stranded at a time when looking for other placements is extremely difficult.

Although the final figures are not yet in, as it stands now, almost half of the 80 Beacon students have enrolled at Smithville Christian High School, some 30 kilometers west of St. Catharines. Almost the same number have opted for Eden High School. According to Darrell Gillespie, current principal of Beacon and former principal of Eden, "parents need to understand that Eden is not a Christian Education institution in the complete or traditional sense. They will not find a school there staffed exclusively by Christians, as this would violate the Ontario Employment Law. Eden has faced a steady erosion in its Christ-centered practices and activities from the days of its inception over two decades ago."

Gillespie is also concerned about the shifting paradigm in the supporting community of Christian schools. He is convinced, after talking to Christian Reformed pastors and other Christian school supporters, that even though sending your child to a Christian school was almost non-negotiable in the past, that is no longer true today. Yet he courageously proposed a plan at the beginning of this year to "work through our current situation and explore how we might move ahead to establish a healthy private Christian education enterprise." His plan included "confessing our sins of pride and poor stewardship and seeking God's forgiveness." Principal Gillespie's plan may not have saved Beacon Christian High School, but it did set the association on a firmer spiritual footing as it continues to offer Christian education at the elementary school level.



Darrell Gillespie, principal of Beacon.

At a previous meeting of the Beacon family where the fate of the high school was discussed, one long-time supporter walked up to the mike and, in his usual curt manner, said, "Don't let the ship go down." He died on the day the school went down, causing his daughter to say, "I'm glad Dad did not have to hear this sad news."

Bert Witvoet has been active in the Christian school movement all his adult life as a teacher and principal, as editor of the Christian Educators Journal, and as chair of the Beacon board for five years. He has been semi-retired for 12 years and lives in St. Catharines.

Odds and Trends

Playing sick

For years, psychiatrists have used the term Münchausen syndrome to describe people who invent and even simulate fake symptoms to get attention from their doctors. The condition is named after incorrigible liar Baron Münchausen, who travelled widely in the 1700s and loved to tell "dramatic and untruthful" stories about himself. Syndrome sufferers seem to simply crave the sympathy of a listening, gullible ear.

Enter the world wide web. The proliferation of online communities and support groups now offer plenty of willing ears and endless emails' worth of sympathy, if you know how to spin your symptoms. On a website called Connected Moms, Australian "Mandy" shared her trials with leukemia, a subsequent stroke and coma, ensuing seizures, peritonitis and finally flesh-eating disease. After three years of drama, it was all revealed as a hoax; Mandy had never been sick, unless you count her insatiable need for emotional support in the form of emails, "positive thoughts" and prayers from other website members. One online friend spent up to three hours a day with Mandy, listening to her troubles via webcam.

Although it's very hard to catch such scams, some psychiatrists believe it's a growing trend, and they've started using the term "Münchauser by internet" (MBI) as a diagnosis. And while we can feel for the scammers – so starved for compassion – it's also hard on the online communities when it becomes clear that their emotions have been manipulated. Nonetheless, one such website founder is pragmatic: "We'd rather be taken in," she says, "than deny support and advice to someone who's real."

That pricey gym membership

More people around the world suffer from obesity than malnourishment, according to recent research. In response, the Canadian authors of *XXL: Obesity and the Limits of Shame* have an alternative to the largely unsuccessful top-down solutions (posters, videos, and calorie labels) tried so far. Their book suggests government-funded "healthy-living vouchers" that could be redeemed in certain certified locations – like gyms, farmers' markets and diet classes. Since the causes of obesity vary, it makes sense to implement a variety of accessible strategies in combatting it.

As time passes, more and more links are being found between obesity and poverty in North America as well. As Matt Ridley wrote in *The Wall Street Journal*, "the ultra-rich have already solved [the problem of obesity]. Most of them are very thin these days, quite unlike in ancient times. That's because they can afford the solutions that work for them, from low-carb diets to personal trainers."

If it's true that another penalty of being poor in Canada is the added risk of being overweight, then Parliament should consider healthy-living vouchers rather than more healthy-living advertising. After all, CBC's current challenge to get Canadians to *Live Right Now* can only last so long.

Angela Reitsma Bick